



MEASURE

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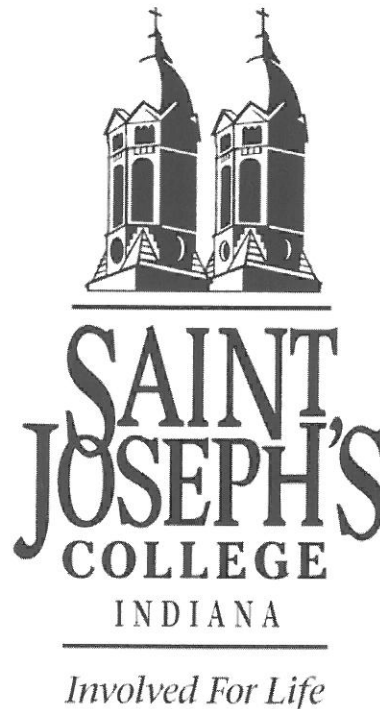


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Lint

Gloria Leonard

Lint, what else could there be?
Pockets inside out,
International sign for "I'm broke."
If I had a dollar for every piece
Of lint in the corners of my pockets,
I'd be a dollar richer,
Because even lint is scarce.

Hindus, Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies by Abe J. A. Victoria Berenda

Hindus, Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies by Abe J. A. Dubois is older than me.
January 11, 1992 is stamped in the due date card.
The blue cover is worn;
All 741 pages have yellowed;
And there is a musty smell.
I don't want to research Indian birthdays,
And judging by the pages that are falling out,
I don't think Hindus, Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies wants me to either.

Cycles

Kristina Hemmerling

Spirals
Spinning
Ups and downs -
Life is a cycle
That never stops.
You think you're moving up
But at the next turn you're going down.
Down at the bottom,
An endless pit.
You're stuck there
You'll never leave
You'll die here
Alone.
And then he lifts you up
But it's not just him
It was you, too.
You're strong
And smart
In the ways you always tell yourself you
aren't.
And at this point
You can accept that.
You are strong
And smart
And worth something, too.
But it's lurking behind you
That cycle
Waiting for the slip
That turn
That moment when it all
falls
apart
again.



Samantha Rains, *Tree Study*, pen and ink

Mrs. Not So Well

Nicole Thomsen

“Ryan, that’s enough!” Mrs. Wells told her husband.

“Jane, think about it,” her husband quietly retorted. Their son, Josh, was sitting with his girlfriend, Rebecca, on the couch, watching a movie just out of earshot. Josh was the senior star point guard at Roosevelt High School. He had met Rebecca his sophomore year. She was a freshman on the cheer squad. They spent most of their time at Josh’s house, mostly watching television. Sometimes when Josh’s parents went to sleep they would disappear into the basement. Josh always brought her home on time and they never seemed to argue, odd for a couple of their age.

Mrs. Wells remained quiet. She stopped cleaning the dishes and just let the water run. Her back was to her husband; he was still sitting at the kitchen table. Mr. Wells fingered the loose strings at the end of the tablecloth.

Mrs. Wells sighed, “When did you notice it?”

He replied, “Last year.”

She remarked, “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I just—I don’t know. I believed her,” he said.

“Well I still believe her,” she said.

“Jane! How many times has she stuttered when she told us? How many excuses has she had?”

“She’s a cheerleader! She’s bound to get banged-up.”

“I don’t want to believe it as much as you but—”

“Then don’t! How could you accuse him of something like that? You’re supposed to be his father!”

“Jane.”

“It could be her parents! Why not them?”

Josh’s head jerked to the side. He pulled his arm off Rebecca’s shoulder. “Everything all right?”

Mrs. Wells jumped. “Sure hon, fine.” She glared at her husband, “I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”

“Jane, dammit! It can’t be ignored. She only has bruises after they lose. It can’t be a coincidence. I’d understand if maybe it was every now and then, but,” Mr. Wells groaned. He looked away from his wife, his fingers playing with the tablecloth again. “Hon, it’s all the time, almost every other week, and always after a loss. Don’t you think I would have thought about it being her

parents? Our son is hitting this girl. He's hurting her! Our son is—"

"Our son? Our son!" She turned her back on him throwing her hands in the sink. Her fingers wandered in the soapy water. They found a sponge. She brought it to the surface and clenched it until her hand turned white. Pulling a plate from the drying rack she began to scrub. She began to hum.

Mr. Wells watched her. He went to her. "Jane, I—" He put his hand on her shoulder. She turned around. She reached her hand up to his face and held it on his cheek. Mrs. Wells removed her hand slowly. She pulled a piece of her blond hair out of her face and suddenly with a swift, loud, open palmed whack, struck her husband.

Mrs. Wells turned her back to him again. She did not say anything. He did not say anything. Her small palm left a rosy red impression on his cheek. She leaned into the sink her fingers looking for another dish to clean. She laughed. Then very quietly, more to herself, she whispered, "My son does not hit women. He just does not."

Celia

Victoria Berenda

Using paper towel and Windex,
She cleans the glass counter over the engagement rings
She gives a half smile to those walking by
And asks, "Can I help you?" to those who look interested
She's wearing a black suit with pearl earrings
Her blonde hair is in a low ponytail
She's pretty, but her nose is too pointy,
And her blue eyes are kind of sunken into her face
"May I see that one?" I point and ask her
The woman at the counter gets out a white gold, solitaire ring
I put it on
It's gorgeous
"The big question is coming any time.
I can feel it," I tell her.
The woman behind the counter scoffs and says,
"So did I."

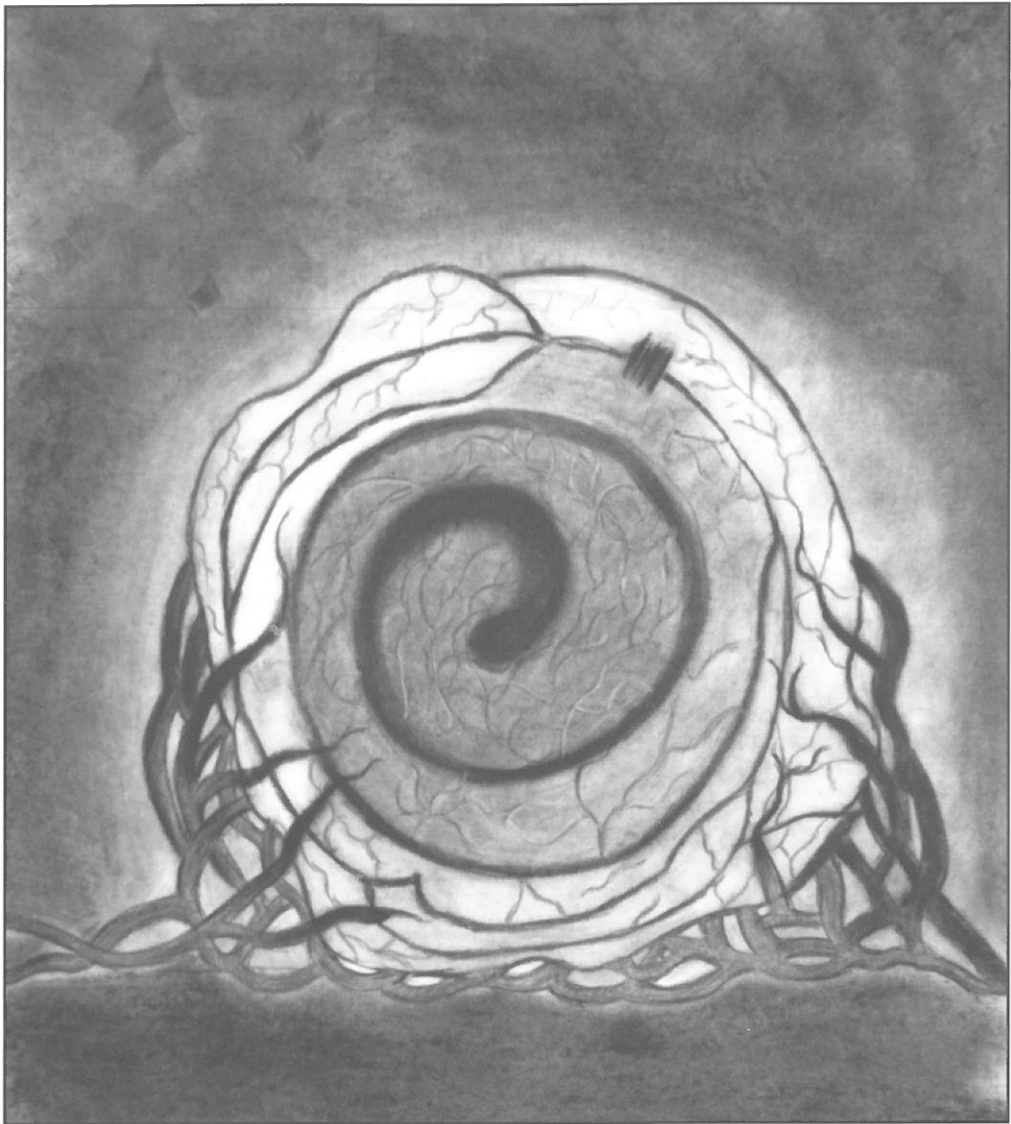
Diary of a Ragdoll

Amanda Rousseau

"People say I'm scrawny. People say I'm weak. People keep me weary. People keep me bleak. They just don't understand the company I keep. Locked away so lonely, in my chest."

A crack of light breaks through the pine wood box. The morning light brings early life. A young girl sits upon the floor. Bright eyes filled with wonder. Heart full of glee. Her cotton binds across her chest. Depictions of lilies and the pest. Her little hands reach towards for a dolly she wants to hold. It's her ragdoll. So old and so torn. With love, she is tattered. With love, she is worn.

Much more than a baby doll who gets tossed around. This one companion that she found. Eyes of violet. Strands of coal. Button eyes and faded nose. A small smile painted on with haste. Jointless body, arms and all. Stuffing puffing from the seams. Cotton fluffing underneath a sewn-on pocket. Embraced with lace. Patches.



Victoria Lawson, *Dear Dad*, charcoal



Kristina Hemmerling, *Figure*, stoneware clay

Hold My Hand

Mike Sosnowski

The Beatles said it best,
“I wanna hold your hand.”
It’s something simple
but yet so grand.
You fill me with hope,
you fill me with fear.
Because if you say no
my heart will start to tear.
And if you said yes
my soul would leap,
joyous and complete,
for it would be yours to keep.
If you take my hand,
you take my heart
So please be gentle
or it’ll fall apart.
And I can’t live
like that again.

A Dark Place Without You

Mandi McCloskey

Without you the world is a dark cold place.
I'm all alone floating up in space.
The sun does not shine and the moon has no illumination.
Without you the world does not rotate forward
it spins violently backwards.
I am not grounded or secure.
But with you all of this goes away
and the stars shine brighter than the brightest day.

Mason Angelo

Nicole Thomsen

I taste you in my heart.
Shy hints of coconut.
Dixie Peach.
I taste you in my veins.
Your sickly sweet runs through me.

Something

Katie Davisson

I want that kind of impossible love. The kind where we argue all the time, but not about anything important. You'll always disagree with me without even knowing it. And then when we make up, we say sorry with our kisses and give forgiveness with the breathless gasps in between them. That kind of love where we have all the important things in common and are opposites in the areas that matter. You'll obsess over the same television shows and movies, and stay up with me all night having deep conversations about why we are the way we are. You'll be warm when I'm cold, you'll be collected when I'm frazzled. I'll be the one who can make sense to you when no one else can, and you'll be the person who gets me when no one else does.

The kind of love where our bodies fit like puzzle pieces because our minds already are melded together as one. When I say walk, you say run. When you say stay, I say go. You'll call me on my bullshit excuses and make me own up to my mistakes. I'll get all of your jokes, and laugh at the ones that don't make sense. You'll think I'm funny because you love me, not because I actually have a sense of humor. You'll find my sneezes cute, and my weird pronunciations of words endearing. I'll love the fact that you're the sweetest gentleman and the hugest jerk.

When I point out a girl with a nice ass on the street, you'll tell me she's hot then kiss me deep and hard. You'll listen to my obsession over boys I'll never get, because I've had the perfect one all along.

I'll love you for everything, inside and out, unconditionally. Forever.

Torn

Gloria Leonard

A man and a woman lie in the bed of a truck.
It is twilight.
Soon, the world around them will fall asleep.
Beside her leg is a bare
Spare tire; stars
Begin to light up the curtain of black.
I watch him lift his right arm
As though to stretch as he yawns
But slyly pulls her closer—
In the distance,
One, a few, and then a pack:
The howling of coyotes.
And then she embraces him back,
Finding comfort in his beating heart.

I open my eyes; you have left my side.
Any minute now
The sun will rise above the hills.
The look on your face, I thought,
As I rubbed my temples and close my eyes
To unsee it.
How torn you were. And the choice between
Leaving and staying was simple.

Waffles

Randee Portteus

The living room is a mess of trash and empty hard liquor bottles and my roommate, Cassie, is passed out on the couch, red dress wrinkled. She threw another raging party last night. Our wood-paneled TV is rolling the credits of Disney's Cinderella, which she only watches when she feels bad. I sigh, annoyed.

"Cassie," I snap, "wake up and get off the couch. You'll have to sleep this off in your room." She opens her eyes and mumbles, "Lacey, what's ... what's ..." I don't let her finish.

"Get up! Come on! Let's go!" I have no sympathy for her right now. I dealt with assholes taking swipes at my butt and staring down my shirt all night at work. McKinney's isn't the trashiest restaurant/bar in town, but it's not the classiest either. It's sort of a nicer Hooters, and it's what I could get after college. I apply for jobs weekly, but so far nothing has come up, so I stay at McKinney's.

Cassie stumbles to her feet but can hardly stand. I take her arm and help her to her room. There I help her change and cover her up. She makes me angry sometimes, but she's my best friend. I make sure she's asleep and go to my room. It's next to hers, separated by a bathroom. My bed is made with my blue comforter, two pillows, and my favorite bear. Even though I'm twenty-three I still sleep with it. My shelves have all of my books from college, plus the ones I collected before and after at garage sales and flea markets. My dresser has pictures of my family sitting on it neatly, and my vanity is the only thing that's cluttered. Makeup, a hairbrush, hair ties, bobby pins, tissues, and q-tips litter the top of it.

I sigh, taking off my heels and brushing my dark curls out of my face as I sit in front of my vanity mirror. The curls are fake, forced into my straight hair by a curling iron, and my dark color is from a box. My eyelashes are fake, my lips and cheeks painted on, and the cleavage created by a push-up bra. Sometimes I feel like the girl that leaves for work is not me at all, but a slutty imposter. I pull back my hair and examine myself. I look tired. Are those wrinkles? Yes. Crow's feet are visible at the corners of my eyes. I shake my head and start taking off my makeup.

The first swipe with a cotton pad soaked in makeup remover succeeds only in smearing dark stuff across my face. I study the effect, wondering if it even matters if I wear makeup, or if those guys at the bar just look at my body. I continue the process of uncovering my real face. When it's finally off, I change from my work clothes gratefully and into sweatpants and a t-shirt and the transformation is complete. I'm Lacey again. Sometimes, I think I'm going to suffocate in my "costume" of makeup and heels and slutty clothes. But I never do; I only come home feeling a little

emptier than before.

This morning, I wander to the kitchen and look through the cabinets before deciding I want an omelet. I open the fridge, grab some vegetables, and start. Cooking is something I enjoy, and I lose myself in chopping vegetables—you have to do that first. I hum quietly to myself. When I have a satisfactory pile of veggies, I break the eggs in the skillet and listen to them sizzle and pop for a moment. Being here in the kitchen takes me away from my dirty house, my crappy job, and my messed up life.

When I turn to grab a spatula from the counter behind me, someone is standing there.

I scream and grab for the skillet, throwing my eggs on the floor as I brandish it at him. “Who are you and what do you want?” I’m yelling and backing away.

He steps back, his hands up in a defensive gesture. He’s young, probably my age, and his hair and clothes are rumpled. He must have been sleeping in the back room and I missed him when I walked in. “I’m Ben, sorry, you were just happy when you were cooking and I didn’t want to interrupt.”

“What are you doing here?” I demand, lowering my pan.

“I was here for Cassie’s party.” He said, “By the way, is she alright?”

“Yes. She’s fine. In bed now. Why are you still here? And why were you staring at me while I was cooking?”

“I fell asleep on the futon last night. Sorry.”

“Well why are you in my kitchen?” I was impatient now. He wasn’t giving me many answers and the ones he was giving were slow.

“I heard you humming and thought you might be Cassie. I wanted to say goodbye to her.”

Oh, so that was it. Ben was another of Cassie’s puppy dogs. He was in love with her and she would never give him the time of day because she was in love with her on-again-off-again jerk boyfriend Michael. He would ignore her, treat her like crap, say awful things to her, and she would run to Ben or someone else like him. He would comfort her and dry her tears, and she would go back to Michael so he could be mean to her again. I laughed at poor Ben’s stupidity. These men were all stupid, and even worse, all the same.

“She’s in her room. You can wake her up at your own risk.” I grab the paper towels and get down on my knees to clean the eggs off the floor. My perfectly good omelet is wasted.

“She won’t mind if I do.” Ben wanders towards her room, seeming lost. A minute later I hear Cassie shriek, “Get out!” Ben slumps back into the kitchen.

“No luck, bro?”

He shakes his head, looking at his shoes. Against my will, I begin to feel sorry for him. He seems more innocent and less stupid than Cassie's other boys. I put new eggs in the skillet, thinking. Reluctantly, tentatively, I say, "Hey, listen. You hungry? I can make you something. Omelet. Scrambled eggs. Bacon. Pancakes. Waffles." I'm sure he'll refuse and start whining about Lena.

"Waffles?" he says, the beginning of a smile on his face.

I pause, surprised. Then, while my eggs are cooking, I take the waffle maker out from under the sink. I'm trying not to smile. "Waffles." I say, a grin breaking out on my face despite my attempt to scowl.

"Chocolate chip waffles?" his voice is hopeful.

I grab the chocolate chips from the top of the fridge. "I thought that was the only kind there was." This kid and I are going to get along.

He hung out with me for a few hours. He helped me as much as I would let him and we talked while we cooked. There was a two-person table in our small kitchen next to our window. He and I sat there and ate.

"My mom made me chocolate chip waffles every day one summer." He said after a pause in the conversation.

I laughed. "Why?"

"My mom was always doing weird things like that with us." He shrugged, "She was a crazy lady."

"Was?"

"She died a few years ago."

"I'm sorry." I didn't know how to respond.

"It's all good."

I figured at this point most people would say, 'Do you miss her?' or 'How long has she been gone?' but I could only think one thing: "You're really open about it, huh?"

"What?"

"I mean, you don't mind talking about it."

"Nah," he laughed, "I don't mind talking about anything." He smiled at me, and I was again surprised by this boy. I built walls and kept people out and tried so hard to push everyone away, everyone but Cassie. That's why we were friends. We had been since college, when she'd caught me at a more vulnerable point in life. She knew me before I started to shut people out, and even when I began to, she refused to be pushed away. She'd always been there for me. She was the only person I trusted – but this kid trusted instinctively, just let people in. How could he do this? How could he be

this way?

Our conversation moved on, but I was stuck on this point until he walked out the door.

I was cleaning the kitchen when Cassie struggled in, a hand in her blonde hair. She jumped to sit on the counter and moaned, leaning her head against the cabinet. I felt annoyance flare up inside me, but I pushed it down. I had to hear her side of things first. I counted to ten before asking, "Want some eggs?" She nodded. "Omelet?" She shook her head. "Scrambled?" She nodded. "Green eggs and ham?" She nodded again. She hadn't opened her eyes. I became more annoyed and began slamming things around as I cooked.

I cracked open the eggs into a mug, completely shattering the shells in my anger, and spent a chunk of time fishing all the pieces out. Then I added the green food coloring and started scrambling them in the skillet. I went to the fridge for the ham. "Rough night last night?" My voice was tight, my anger more obvious than I wanted it to be, but she didn't notice.

Cassie groaned again.

"Cassie. Speak."

"I don't wanna." She whined.

"Cassie."

She sighed heavily and over-dramatically. "Michael and I got in a fight last night."

No surprise there. Out of courtesy, I asked, "Why?" I didn't really care.

"He didn't wanna come over last night."

"Why not?"

"He was going out with his friends."

Shocking. "What else?"

Cassie groaned again. "I kissed Ben."

I was silent, stewing as I added the ham to the skillet. I wondered if they'd really just kissed or if they'd done more. I was oddly protective of Ben, even though I usually hated these kinds of guys. Cassie kept on the line. Finally, I said, "How was that?"

"Fine. I have to tell Michael now."

"Or you could break up with him."

"What?"

"You heard me."

"Lacey, stop. We've been together two years." And I've hated him for every second.

"He's a sack of shit."

“No he’s not!”

“Then why’d you kiss Ben?”

“Because he was there and he was so nice.”

“Do you realize how that sounds?” I was angry now. It was one thing for her to drag poor, pathetic saps around who knew what she was doing, but another completely to do this to nice guys who didn’t know what kind of girl she was.

Cassie was surprised by my reaction. Her voice was flat. “What?”

“He’s a nice guy, Cassie, and he likes you, just like every other guy you drag around. But you still run back to Michael.”

“Whatever. He’ll be fine.”

I opened my mouth to reply, to let loose with everything I wanted to say to her, to finally speak my mind but – I couldn’t. I had a lease with this girl. I was tired, I was angry, and I needed sleep more than anything. Now was not the time. Anticlimactic though it was, I dumped Cassie’s green eggs and ham onto a plate, dropped it on the counter, and slammed the skillet back onto the stove. “Yeah,” I said, “whatever. You can figure this one out yourself, Cassie.”

I collapsed face down on my bed and groaned. Why? Why did Cassie have to be so hard to get along with? I told myself to stop pouting, pulled my teddy bear close, and fell asleep. When I woke up, the afternoon sun was in my face. I sat up and looked around, taking in my room and the sound of voices from the living room. I listened carefully.

Michael was here.

And they were yelling.

“Yeah, well you can just get the fuck out!” Cassie was screaming. Really screaming. “You’re a useless sack of shit!” I grinned. That was my phrase. I heard our front door slam, and I made my way to my own door. I cracked it open and saw Cassie standing in the living room, looking at her feet and crying. I opened my door all the way. “Cassie?” I asked.

She looked at me, then away, hurriedly wiping tears off her cheeks. “Yeah?” Her voice was thick from crying.

“What’s wrong?”

She threw her hands in the air and wailed, “Michael broke up with me!” I smirked at her melodramatics, then went and put my arms around her.

“It’ll be okay. You don’t need him and he really is a useless sack of shit.”

“I know.” She sniffled.

“Wanna watch Cinderella?”

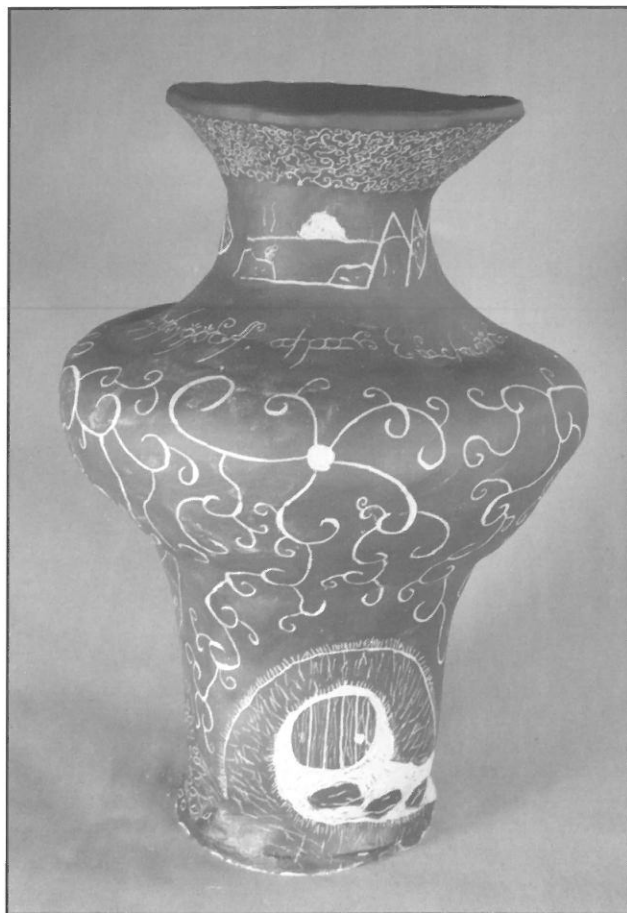
She nodded. Then paused. “Can we invite Ben back over?” She was smiling at this thought, as if it would please me. For some reason, it made me want to throw another pillow-punching fit. Instead, I smiled back and said, “Sure. That’s a great idea.”

Halfway through the movie, Ben showed up on our front porch, eager puppy dog that he was. He and Cassie cuddled for the rest of the movie, and when I went to the kitchen for water I could hear them giggling. I suffered in silence, wondering how many times I could get pissed at my roommate in a day. Seriously, who went through this many mood swings? She’d been drunk, hungover, angry, sad, angry, heartbroken, sad, and now happy again. I couldn’t keep up.

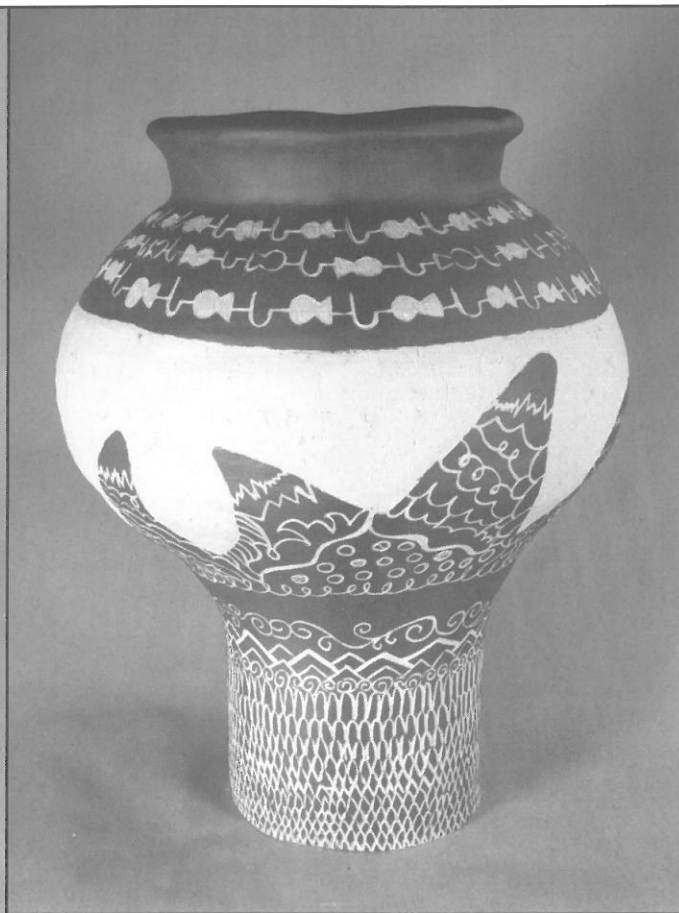
And Ben. What was he doing? He’d just had his heart broken by this girl this morning and then they were practically in love. Was this sixth grade? After the movie I mumbled some excuse about going to the grocery store. I spent an hour wandering around Wal-Mart trying to fill the empty void in my chest with candy and other pointless items I found in my trek around the entire store.

When I got home, Cassie and Ben were making out on the couch.

By then it was time for work again, so I showered, slutted up, and slammed the door on my way out of the house. I didn’t know what to do with Cassie. Or Ben. For that matter, I didn’t know what to do with myself.



Sarah Beetz, *Greek Amphora*, black slip on stoneware



Kristina Hemmerling, *Greek Amphora*, black slip on stoneware

The Worst Cashier

Alyssa Cook

Working weeknights,
Dealing with impatient customers,
And tinkering with fussy machines
For minimum wage
Could drive anyone crazy.

So Brandy drinks coffee at the register,
Attempting to keep her sanity.
She used to have silky blonde hair,
But it wasn't bold enough
So she dyed it black and blue.

Her small frame is swimming
In her large "Staples" polo shirt.
She ties up the back with a rubber band
And puts her nametag over the logo,
Hoping nobody recognizes her.

She wants to walk out,
Say, "I quit this god-forsaken place!"
But her family needs the money,
Her sister has to eat.
Her mother has to drink.

Brandy's aisle is empty.
She's too "sarcastic, blunt, and rude."
But I don't care; I know her story.
Supporting a mother who drinks for a living
Could drive anyone crazy.

Masks

Nicole Thomsen

When I was sixteen I grabbed a tube of Prussian Blue paint and splattered it on a canvas. I didn't feel the need to make anything that would make sense I just wanted to make something; to show something without words or pictures. I didn't want to tell the story anymore; I wanted people to take it for what it was and imagine their own. I didn't use a brush, I didn't use a palette knife, I didn't even use my hands. I took buckets of paint and threw them everywhere. I placed open tubes on the ground and stomped on them. Paint was soaring in every direction. My only goal was to have no goals. I just wanted to make something.

But those somethings that meant nothing abruptly changed. It began subconsciously. Slowly I began to recognize what it was that I was putting in each one of them. Myself. I was lost and so were they. They took my secrets and held on to them without really saying what they were.

I made several of these paintings. I used different colors for each one. I went into a room with a particular memory in mind, found the right colors and I let them fall as they wished. There were a total of seventeen different sizes and colors when I was done. My series was finished. It took nearly three years.

When I brought the finished product before my professor, she just stared at them for a while. Other than being abstract they really didn't have a lot in common. The shades and tints varied, same with the sizes. My professor basically called them shit and moved on to her next student. I wasn't going to let her negative comments bring me down. I photographed all of them and made a portfolio. I submitted it to multiple universities to see if any had any interest in them. Not one person replied.

Disheartened, I took the task on foot. I researched galleries, which ones had previous abstract showings and which ones didn't. I found more than a few in the local area. They all told me that I lacked meaning, effort. Some said I was too young, that nineteen wasn't old enough to have a personal statement or style.

These were my babies, my children. I bore them; they were a part of me just as much as I was of them. Just because they weren't obvious or perfect doesn't mean they were defects. After two years of searching I caved. I painted over my darlings. They became teenage girls wearing too much make-up, saying everything you needed to know about them by their outfits. Suddenly universities wanted them, galleries began to call daily.

I sold them all. Inside those paintings were my secrets. They all held some emotion, some fear, some dream and now they're all gone. Paid in full. No longer my babies. Just masks. Expensive, representational, cliché masks.

Shaking Motivation

Jefferson Rollings

We locked eyes through a window,
And it was at that point that one of us
Was forever changed.
I turned away,
And worried about what she would think.
I saw her later,
But she only asked about school.

Six months flew by,
And we found ourselves separate and alone,
On a warm May evening.
I went against an earlier decision,
And sat with her.
No one else we knew showed up.
Somehow, we had a nice dinner together,
And neither of us were bored.

Two more months passed,
Only for me to realize
How much she means to me.
Even through an emergency operation,
My memory of her pulled me through
The most dangerous part.
While on vacation,
She was all I could think about.
After I came back,
We saw each other.
And while I see her often,
I have never been more nervous
To be around such a girl.

Alone

Patrick Massoels

A game of chess stuck at stalemate;
A limbo forever between victory and loss.
Pawns move and bishops fall,
But the kings keep steadfast on their squares.

Frustrated and devastated,
We look for the one move that will end the torment.
The perfect battle of serenity and depression,
A game of chess stuck at stalemate.

Because

Katie Davisson

Why does there always have to be a reason for something? Sometimes I like just doing things **because**. *Because*, I want to. *Because*, I can. *Because*, I *like* it. I want that moment that you see in the movies, or maybe it's a dream I made up, or maybe it's nothing at all. It's that moment where the boy and girl stay up late all night, whether it's at a party or on a walk or just when they're together. For no reason at all. And then it's time to go, but neither of them want to. And suddenly, there's the idea of they *don't have* to. So, they stay. And they are together. Maybe they sleep together, maybe they don't. But, it doesn't matter. Because, the reason they're doing it isn't defined.

We're taught to do everything for a reason. Why? Why do you like her? Because she's pretty. So what? Why can't you say hi? Because I'm shy. Who cares? Why don't you like her? Because she's fat. Get over it. Walk up to that girl and tell her how you really feel. And if you really want a reason, here's one. One day she won't be there anymore and you'll be left wondering what would have happened "If" and she won't be there to hypothesize with you.

Because you missed out. Because you cared about why, you cared about who, you cared about everything but what is important.

Because.

Not Ready

Kristina Hemmerling

So I like this boy
And he likes me
But a lot of the time
I don't feel ready
To date him
Or love him
Or any of that
Because of what happened
In my past.

I was broken
And felt beaten
And torn to shreds
And my heart cannot handle
Something like that again.

I'd like to move on
And I'd like to start something new
But at this point
It all happened too soon.

I need to get over it
And love myself again
But that doesn't seem to be close
No, not yet.

I'm working on things
And trying to cheer up
Some days it's good
And some days it sucks.

Dice

Thomas Day

Of the oldest of games I come from, I hail.
Thrown into chaos, ship without sail.
Not where but how I fall settles ones fate.
Six numbers, six sides; what a thing to com'plate.
Kept near with the deck and the money I stay.
Kept close to heart 'till start of the fray.
Now I am tossed, people have fun.
Die, die, die, die, I am just one.

They

Kristina Hemmerling

She smiles
He laughs
Then they look to the ground.

If he knew what to say
To make her change her mind
The words would leave his lips
Without hesitation.

But he's not that knowledgeable
And he's shy
So silence fills their world
This space, the sky.

Boxes

Mike Sosnowski

I work internationally and it's been hard on our relationship. She feels like I'm never there for her. In fact I'm always leaving and it kills me. I wish I was around more. She was so sad before I left for my trip. But I promised that when I got back things would be better. I was not expecting what I actually found.

I could tell the minute I got in the door and dropped my bag I wasn't staying. It's rather obvious when someone sees his stuff piled in the hall in front of the door. Some of it placed neatly in labeled boxes and some of it scattered about as if she had thrown it there in frustration.

I knew we were having problems, but I wasn't expecting for this to be the greeting I got when I returned from my trip. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, and even though I could clearly see my clothes at the top of the pile, I held hope that this wasn't my stuff. I had to check.

The first box was labeled pictures, and sure enough I found every picture that we ever took together and every picture of myself that was in the house. It hurt to see those smiling faces, the closeness between us, and the kisses the camera caught, just sitting there. My denial quickly became replaced with desperation and I ripped open another box. This one contained stuffed animals and love letters, and jewelry. What had been gifts and thoughtful things were little more than trash in this box. I looked again at my clothes. All of them were there too, even the unpaired socks.

My whole body shaking, I moved to find her. But I didn't call her name. I was too afraid of an answer. I checked every room, finding each empty until all that was left was the bedroom. She was just sitting there expecting me. She had her stage face on. A look that meant all of this was rehearsed.

"You're home."

The words fell from her lips without any of the enthusiasm the phrase usually held. I blinked a few times trying to put my thoughts into words before I replied. I tried to be nonchalant and just say "yea," but the question came out without warning.

"What's with all that near the door?"

She took a single breath and answered.

"I just can't do this anymore. It isn't working. And the best thing for me is if you leave."

Her first words broke my heart, but the last part made me angry. Before I knew it the words rushed through my brain like a volcanic eruption. When they left my mouth they were heated.

"Why do I have to leave!"

Though I screamed she sat there calmly—coldly.

“Because I’m tired of you, of us. I’m tired of being the one who has to run away. So this time I’m standing my ground. Besides you’re always leaving home anyways. You’re good at it.”

It hit me all at once like cold water. I wanted to say more. I wanted to argue. But she was already shaking her head. The conversation was already over, there was nothing I could say to her. There was nothing she would listen to. I walked back to the entryway and grabbed my bag; I left.

Darlene

Tabitha Blaisdell

Avoiding eye contact won’t do any good,

Running into her is inevitable.

She’s a light skinned, brown curly haired machine named Darlene.

She has an internal pager that goes off the second a new customer enters.

Hiding yourself behind a shelf doesn’t help.

She still manages to find you.

She approaches, she reels you in.

You’re her next victim.

With a smile too wide for her face, she says

“Helloooooooooo, is there anything I can assist you with!?”

“No, I’m fiii...” I stammer out.

But it’s too late, her words trample over mine.

She trails on about all the latest sales,

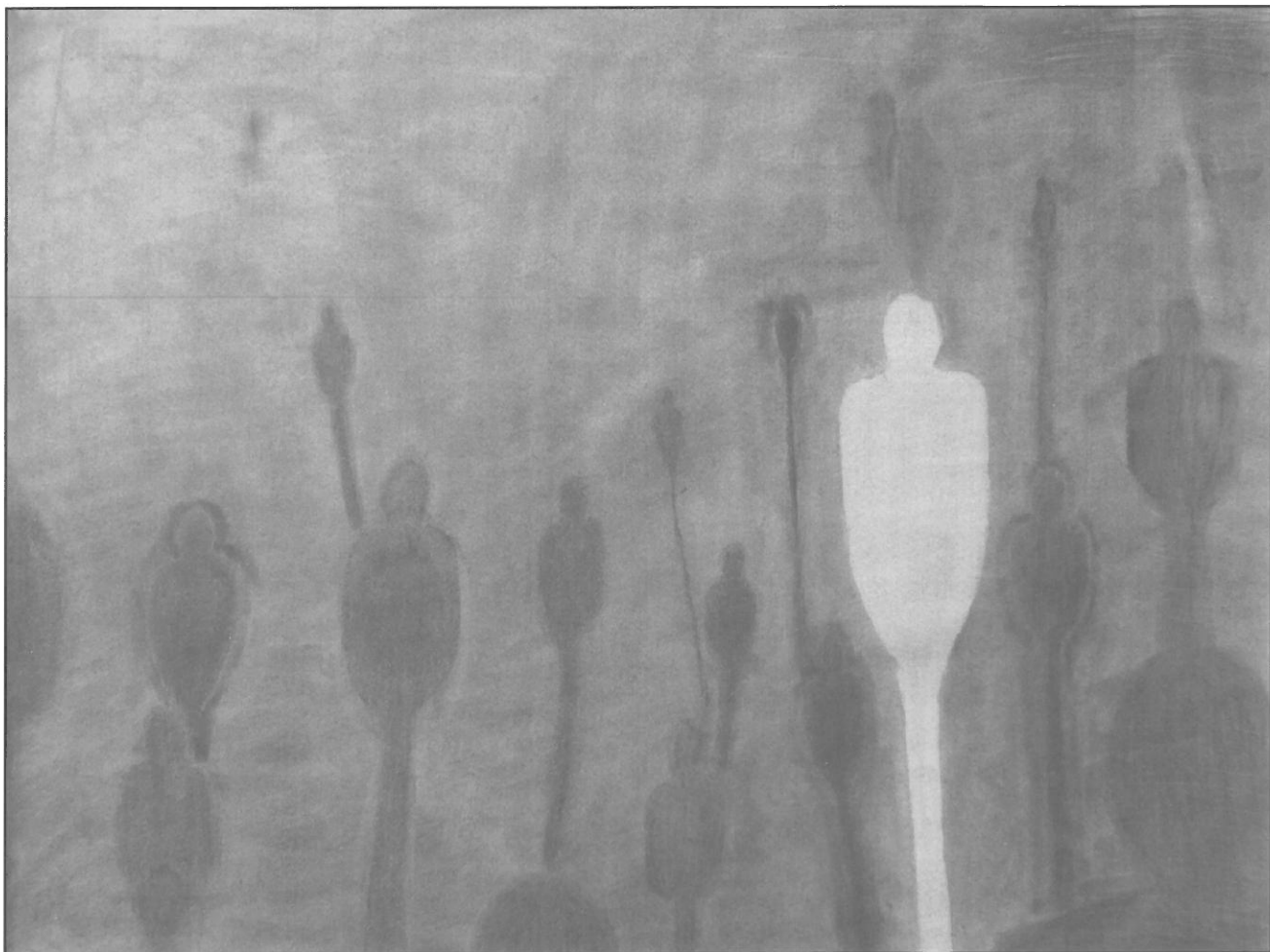
The big clearance event coming up next month

And how she used to take her daughter shopping here.

There’s loneliness beneath that oval shaped face.

Despite her eager demeanor, she seems desperately alone.

This JC Penney’s department store is the one place she calls home.



Grant Jenkins, *Isolation*, charcoal

Endless

Patrick Massoels

Hundreds of miles above the world,
There is nothing to carry sound.
There is no air.
There is no gravity.
Survival in this ocean of stars is impossible.
I am drifting,
Spinning away from my blue marble.
There is no one to come save me.
There is no one to hear me cry.
My breathing is rash.
My heart is pounding.
This abyss will be my tomb.
Yet I find some comfort in the view.
I see the sun rising over the Atlantic.
I see the Northern Lights flash on the pole.
But the stars are what I fall for.
Even as I drift off into the darkness,
Their light shines out to me.
I close my eyes to that final sight,
And wait for sleep to take me.

The Other Side

Tanner Brunson

Welcome to the real world,
a line that never goes out of style.
But it never makes sense until you're stuck
on the wrong side of the glass.
The sun shining and the birds singing,
and you struggle to make a deadline.
You tell yourself you'll be better for it,
but you know it's just a lie.
You turn from the window, but the light shines on.
You know it's for the future,
but you want to live in the now
so you lift the glass, gently
and torture yourself as you press on.

Dad

Jennie Weer

Smile on his face,
Brushes in his hand,
We walk out to the backyard the summer before the house was foreclosed.
We find a place in the sun,
Where he taught me how to paint a canvas full of bamboo.
His strokes are free, just like his spirit.
His hand controlled, just like his words.
When we are done he lets it dry,
Hangs it up,
And we'll never paint together again.

My Sister's Hair

Patrick McElwain

Like the rest of her, it is impatient.
It bounces, flutters, flies.
It hardly ever stays in one place.
Even when someone tries to tie it down
Or shape it some way,
It somehow resists.
Untamable, unchangeable.
Always free, always loose, always on the move.

My Mom and I

Jennie Weer

“Like mother, like daughter.”
Facial expressions,
Word choice,
Even our voices are similar.
She knows a lot about me,
But we never quite got to that “Let’s be best friends” stage.
I’ve inherited her sarcasm.
I’m one of the few people that have seen her cry,
I’m one of the few that have hated her while loving her.
If she jumped off a cliff would I?
Probably.

How Could You?

Connor Ring

What do you think you are doing?
Are you trying to make me fit in?
Do you think that a silly picture will make me normal?
That's just stupid, thinking like that.
Look at me.
I'm burnt bread in a world of golden toast.
Who would find me more appealing in a frame?

Drive

Mike Sosnowski

Sometimes you just need to drive
along old familiar roads
and get lost in faded memories.
So roll the window down,
let the nostalgia blow through your hair,
tune the radio to the soundtrack of your soul,
and just get lost for a while.

Pretty Little Blue Eyes

Katie Davisson

A sudden halt jerks me awake. I'm on instant alert, reaching for my back, and slowly remember where I am. My surroundings sink in as I notice the rows of seats that make up the inside of the bus. Looking out the window I quickly realize this is my stop, and jump up to gather my duffle from the stow above me. I nod to the conductor, stepping down the stairs and onto the sidewalk.

My mind floods with memories as I look around me. This is the sidewalk where I rode my bike for the first time—rode and crashed. There is where I had my first kiss—behind Mrs. Whaling's bushes. The scenes play on and on in my head as I walk towards my childhood home.

I watch as the red brick begins to show through the trees and bushes. As I walk up the driveway I see a little girl sitting on my front door step. She's about thirteen. Her hair is longer than when I left. I guess hair can grow some in three years. I can't believe she remembered the exact date of my return.

Three years ago I had my truck loaded and was ready to head off to basic training. I opened the driver-side door and was shocked by a pair of pretty little blue eyes. "What are you doin' in here?" I asked.

"You can't leave yet," she explained, and from beside her she pulled out a small little teddy bear. "You have to take Ronald to keep you safe."

I chuckled, taking the stuffed animal. The fur was worn down in places where he'd been cuddled every night and he was missing one eye. In its place was a sewn-in red button. "What's this?" I asked, leaning against the door of my truck.

"It's my bear. He keeps me safe from nightmares. I'm a big girl now and don't need him, so you can have him."

I reached in and pulled her out of the truck, sitting her on my hip. For a ten year-old she was quite small. "Charity, thank you. Ronald will keep me safe."

She stretched up to kiss my cheek. "Don't forget about me, Terry."

I laughed, knowing I could never forget her cute little face. "How could I? It'll be weird not getting bugged by you every day after school."

She frowned and I set her down, then kneeled next to her. "I won't forget you. Heck, when I get home we can go to the movies or somethin'," I promised, poking her on the nose and standing up.

John came out of the house just then and shook his head. "Charity will you leave Terry alone? He's got better things to worry about than you buggin' him right before we leave."

She looked down at the ground and then up at me one more time before she ran into the

house. I sent a silent prayer out to keep her safe while her older brother and I were out serving our country. Seems God did a pretty good job with her while we were gone.

I walk the last few steps to the front path. The pretty little blue eyes stare at me the whole way. "Ready for that movie?" She asks.

I chuckle and laugh, picking her up for a hug. "Still as annoying as ever, huh?" I asked, messing up her hair. My heart begins to hurt as I remember who was left out on the battlefield.

"I missed you," she whispered into my shoulder. I gave her a tight squeeze before setting her down.

"I miss Johnny," she said even quieter. Me too.

Victory

Mike Sosnowski

You trained for days.
Fought tooth and nail
through the sweat and pain.
Pulled yourself up by your bootstraps,
and when the going got tough
you stuck through it.
On the field of battle
you took a stand.
Muscles rippling,
nerves tensed for every move,
every second planned for,
practiced for,
you will fight.
You will win.
You're always closing.
You're not just a winner.
You are a champion.
The victor.
You put into action
the winning moves.
The only moves.
You take risks.
Get the rewards.
Nike was the Greek goddess of victory.
She is your muse.
In every movement,
in every breath,
she lives in you.
The unstoppable.
The indestructible.
Quitting isn't for you.

Inaction isn't for you.
The crown is for you.
Why?
Because you do.
You act.
You have a purpose,
a goal.
The medal stand does not await you.
you already stand upon it,
the victor,
the king of the ring,
you.

The Smell of Wet Dog

Randee Porteus

It's raining today. The rain makes me think of him. It's cold when I get up, and I pull on my running pants and a sweatshirt. I don't fear the rain. It makes me brave. I hook my dog to her leash. She is old now; she doesn't jump like she used to when I put the leash on. She has a few good years left, and I am happy because I don't want to be alone.

She stands still while I stretch, her leash laying beside her. She watches me, intent, thoughtful. As thoughtful as a dog can be. She is big, and her muzzle is graying now. I wonder how it feels to be gray. Some days I can feel my hair turning gray, my skin wrinkling, my eyes growing hazy. But then I think I'm being crazy. I am crazy.

He made me crazy.

I pick up my dog's leash and we start to jog, a fine mist soaking us. We don't care. The gray reflects our mood and thoughts and us like we could melt away into the gray sky. We didn't used to be this way. We were full of life when we moved into the white house with black shutters and a pretty front porch. We were, and so was he. And one day, I was two lives, something strange and awesome all at once. The life grew and grew, and then it left me as quickly as it had come. It left me bloody and broken and lying on the bathroom floor crying.

He scooped me up and we tried to make it, but I was no longer enough for him. The baby had taken too much of me with. The blonde at his work was, though, and my dog and I were left alone. Her name is Ruff and I got her as a scraggly dog just barely not a puppy. He never liked her much. When he left she started sleeping in bed with me again. She was happy. I was sad. She knew it.

We started running to combat the sad. It works most days. Today is hard because it is bitter cold and the rain bites at us. We labor on, Ruff steady beside me. He never ran with us. Sometimes, I wonder why I was with him at all. Other times, I cry and wonder how I will go on without him.

Other times I do not think of him at all, and those are the times I like the best. I like to be me, and run, and feed Ruff scraps of my lunch. I like her to jump on the couch. I like to stand in the rain. I like to drink coffee late at night and then go out and water my flowers under the stars while my neighbors sleep away the best part of the day. I like to be crazy, just not the crazy he made me be.

There are some people who make you better, and some who make you worse, and some who make you nothing at all. And then there are people who take each thing you offer, no questions, until you are left with nothing but a stack of bones under thinly stretched skin and a broken, barely-beating heart. You don't even realize they're doing it until they are gone.

Then you have to work to put flesh and blood back under that skin, and other things like hope and dreams and happy and goodness and the things that they took from you. You do it, day by day.

I do it, as I reach my porch again, Ruff panting and soaked. She will smell like wet dog all day. He would have hated it.

It makes me smile.

The Bean Sprout

Katie Davisson

Do you remember the time
When I was assigned to take care of that bean sprout
And it was placed in a cup
With some soil in the bottom?

It was only for a weekend,
A few days I had to keep it alive
But I had to fly to Florida
And attend my grandmother's funeral

So you said you would take care of it
And you said that you did
You watered it everyday
And even put it by the window

You were there when I got off the plane
And the styrofoam cup was in your hand
The sprout was all shriveled and brown
You had done a horrible job

So the first thing I did
Was walk straight into your arms
Finally allowed to not be strong anymore
And at that moment I realized

I needed you
Even if
You killed
My plants.

Blackbird

Nicole Thomsen

I can no longer drink black coffee.
The bitter is for me.
It was for me.
I don't understand.
Either I have changed or it has changed.
I simply can't stand it.
Has the bitter finally rejected me?
Am I so dark that even black coffee no longer accepts me?
My heart has been broken.
It is now plagued with sugar.
Poisoned with crème.
Oh my dearest black coffee,
How dare you betray me?

Coffee

Randee Portteus

I never drink my coffee black,
only with milk and sugar.
If I'm black coffee,
you're the good stuff I never was without you.
Alone I am dark and bitter
and often hard to take.
You made me sweet, drinkable.
And now I am just black coffee again.
But you know . . .
I hear some people like that.

A Bulge In His Pocket

Victoria Berenda

I want to pretend I don't see it,
But I've never been much of an actress.
There is a bulge in his right pocket.
I stare at it while we sip coffee and eat donuts at our favorite bakery.
"Do you want to go to the beach this weekend?" he asks.
"Sure," I say.
"The weather is supposed to be nice," he tells me. "We can bring the dog."
"Great," I respond with a half-smile.
I stare at the bulge.
It isn't flat like his cellphone;
It isn't skinny like his pocket knife or wide like his wallet.
It is two inches by two inches and can only be holding one thing—
The white gold, solitaire engagement ring we picked out four months ago.
"Don't say anything. Let him surprise you," I tell myself.
"What are you looking at?" he asks.
"Umm . . . Nothing," I stumble. "Just checking you out."
He smirks and kisses me.
There is still a bulge in his pocket.

Under Uncle's Watch

Nicole Thomsen

Ice.

Six feet deep. Twelve feet deep. Thirty-two feet deep. Drop off. Depth unknown. Two girls, cousins, a blonde, a brunette. They hold hands as they approach the ice. They giggle and inch out toe after toe. Six feet deep. Twelve feet deep. Thirty-two feet deep. Drop off. The black ice, the thin ice. No one knows for sure how deep. Some say it was a rock quarry, some say a really deep lake, others an endless pit. The girls keep inching, toe after toe, hand in hand, nervous giggles.

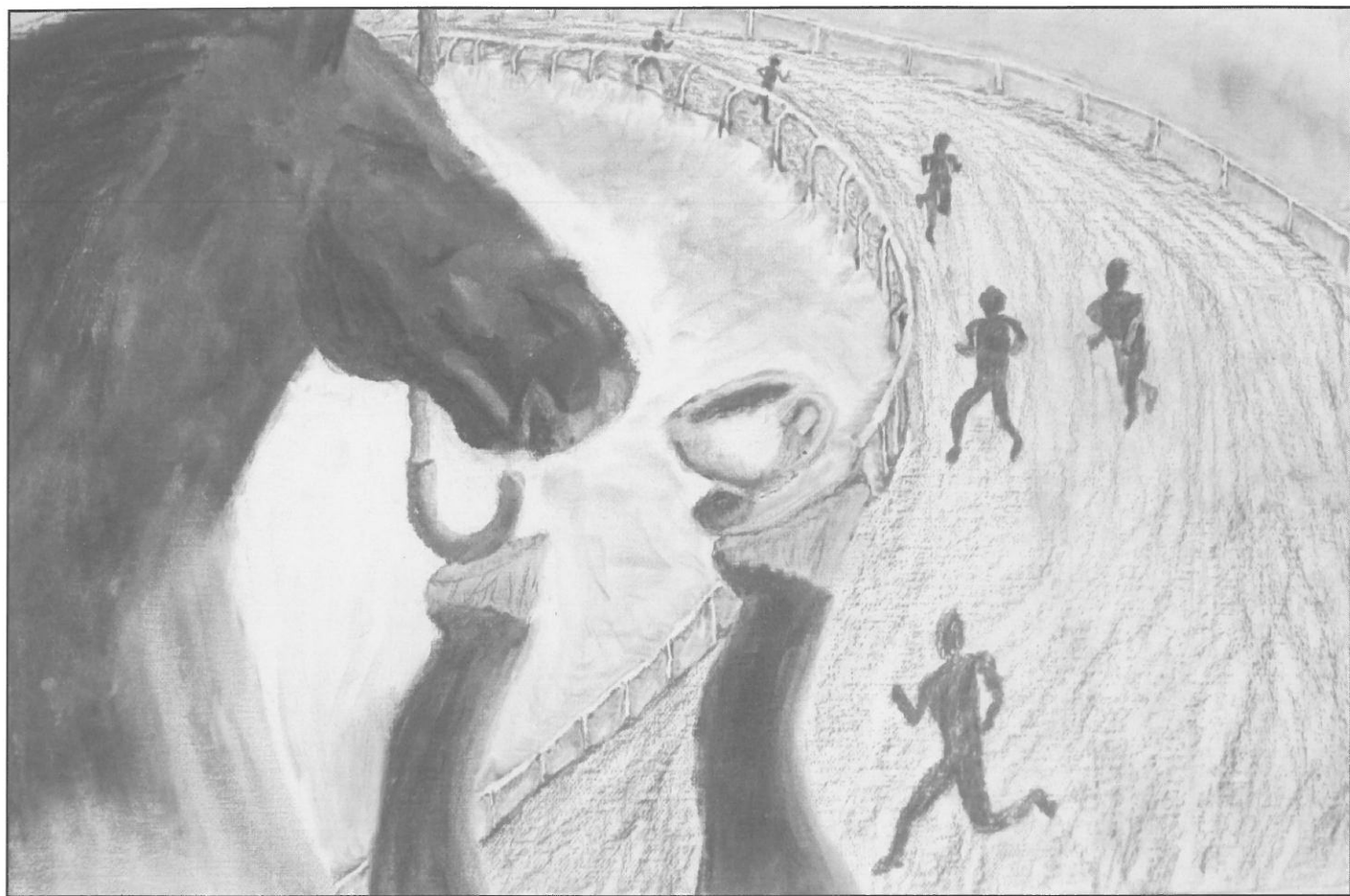
The blonde. She's shorter than the brunette her hair is long, the ends a knot of curls. Blue coat, black pants, rain boots. She holds on tight to the taller girl's hand. The brunette. Frail but filling out, short tight curls. She nibbles on her free thumb. Pink coat, black pants, tennis shoes.

They reach the black ice when the brunette halts. They can see the fish and some of the surfaced weeds below. Black and green. The blonde looks up she pulls on her hand, she wants to go further but the taller girl won't let her. The blonde dares her without any words. She looks out and points to the orange cones, the blocked off, the not yet frozen, the danger zone, the open.

The blonde steps a foot closer, she looks at her taller friend. The brunette only moves a small inch. The blonde steps again, her taller friend only inches. The blonde slides two feet this time, she can hear the cold water rushing over the open ice. The brunette doesn't move she just looks at the blonde. The small girl in the blue coat and rain boots has won. Before she heads back to the chicken, the brunette, she takes one last stride on the black ice.

Crack. The blonde only had time to look up and watch the brunette disappear. Unafraid, just cold now that she was under. A strange thing happened below the black ice, the blonde met a friend, a man in charge of all frozen waters. He took away the cold and helped her let the air out of her lungs, he taught her how to float only not up. He held her until she no longer shook, he didn't shut her eyes lids he let them remain awake. Then suddenly the short girl was taken away, an icy blow to her wrist and she was again on top of the ice. There was the father of the brunette and the tall girl herself. Cousin was crying. The blonde was sad she knew she'd never find that man, her friend, ever again. She knew even if she went back under the cold water the man from the lake would be gone. She was on the surface again, in the world again, alive again. The father of the brunette picked up the blonde and carried her to a cozy warm home. He wrapped her in blankets and whispered in her ear, "You are to tell no one, not your parents or your peers."

She didn't.



Ryan Postma, *The Race*, charcoal

This Halloween

Matt Hess

I know what I'll be for Halloween—drunk
She tried to talk me down
Saying that I could be better as ____
A sober Si Robertson,
Or a sober Jay Gatsby,
Or a sober superhero.
But I am pretty set on this drunken Halloween,
Because we hold hands when we're drunk.

Pages

Patrick Massoels

Turn the page and see a world,
Formed by the mysticisms of imagination.
Fish swim the skies and birds fly under the sea,
And gravity is as necessary as a period.
Each paragraph is a new glimpse at pure creativity.
Each sentence is a window to a dream.
Dare you step onto the ferry and pay the boatman's toll?
Will you cross the River Styx?
Take a breath and jump down the rabbit's hole,
Prepared to go there and back again.

Gaius and Titus

Thomas Day

In the lobby of the Core Building

G: Welcome, my dear Titus, and a good morning to you! It has been far too long since we have had a chance to chat with one another over the intricacies of life.

T: Indeed Gaius. It has been far too long. Of late I have had an issue of great import waxing heavily upon my mind; and knowing it has been said of you to be an expert in all realms of thought. I decided to bring the issue before you in order to gain perchance an answer, for I myself have none.

G: Well, then, sit down my good man. I indeed happen to know more than my fair share of what is known and thus will try to answer your question.

T: Good, I am glad to be helped by one so learned as you.

G: Your question being?

T: Ah yes well then, I don't know how to quite . . . well . . . you see . . . ah, yes!

G: Come on my good man, put it into words!

T: It seems that I don't care.

G: Then why did you ask me?

T: Or I should say that WE don't care.

G: About what?

T: Everything, here let me explain. Answer me this, and be honest: When you heard last year that a huge super storm was going to hit New York, with one of the biggest hurricanes to come to the New England area, did you feel: A. Horrified, B. Frightened, or C. Oddly Excited?

G. erm . . . well . . .

T: Do you as a person, when having to make eye contact with a person, feel: A. social, B. friendly, or C: slightly Nauseated.

G: Well, ok. You see . . .

T: When watching Culture War debates on TV, do you end up: A. Being annoyed, B. Start disliking even the person you agree with, C. Turning the TV off, or D. All of the above.

G: Well, you must understand . . .

T: Or, having the issue of false body images for girls preached to us since we were 'lil tikes, why does society respond with a unanimous, "meh."

G: Oh come on . . .

T: Why do we "care" more about big, puffy, and loose ideologies like "Humanity" than the people we know, live and go to school with, and who are our friends in every sense of the term? Or, having been fed the "Knowledge is Power" Aesop from age three, spend more time playing Angry Birds then learning a new language or studying or working out. The three things that we all KNOW are better and KNOW we have the time for.

G: . . .

T: Or what about this. If you are Pro-Life, that is to say you regard abortion as murder. Do you honestly get upset when you realize that a quarter of the last generation was killed in one of the worst ways possible? Why aren't you in the streets? Why aren't you rioting?

G: You can stop now.

T: Can I? Can I really? Everything has been turned into an abstraction, a label, or the like. The glory of higher education rings in our ears, as an out of tune bell that we have heard and heard and heard until it has lost any and all meaning to us. What do I care about the liberal arts? What do I care about Truth, Goodness, Beauty or the like unless I can get a degree out of it and go on with my path of life? Why should I have to change in order to make the world a “Better” place?

G: Hey, now, don’t get all worked up. As long as you become who you were meant to be, none of that matters.

T: Really now? You are going to feed me the same self-entitled bullshit I have been told my whole life? To say that I should “find myself” would mean that I have a self to find, and that, I think is part of the issue. I can learn more about the gases that make up Jupiter in ten minutes than I, and goodness knows how many others, can know about themselves in their entire life. That is why the Hurricane Sandy excited us last year and “for Humanity!” encourages us. Those things remind us that we are REAL that we EXIST and are not merely ghosts in a shell. This is why some teens like to get drunk and fight, not for honor, fun, or anything else, but by the fact that by breaking ones knuckles on someone else’s cheekbone and having him respond in turn makes one feel alive and not some abstraction that the world has made me out to be. “Here is your Hoosier Sticker, your American Sticker, your Christian Sticker, your Pro-Life sticker and so on. Put them all on. Look, now, you who were formerly an individual of infinite worth and value, can be understood, corralled, marketed toward, lobbied toward, bought out and in general dismissed as one of “Those People” if I disagree with you.

G: (sighs and turns away)

T: And this is what I am getting at. We don’t care. I don’t care. And very few of us care that we don’t care. Why can’t I cry when I read the news in the morning and hear that 73 students were killed in I don’t know astan? Why can’t I feel contrition when I deceive the people who raised me about where I was last night? Why do I feel embarrassed when I buy a Pro-Life bumper sticker? Why was I more excited than pissed off when our government was shut down? How can I sit in my room with my room-mate, who is a human person of infinite value and potential, and not recognize his presence as we both mess around on our lap-tops for over an hour without talking or working?

G: That may be true for you, but your truth is not mine!

T: You just proved my point. And though you don't know it, you have just shown me a piece of the puzzle. People have lost their meaning because meaning has lost it's meaning. Anything can be anything, and it turns out to make most things mean nothing. When we get rid of the value of value, the purpose of purpose, the only natural result is the despair we all feel, whether we hide it or not.

G: I think I see what now what you mean. How did this happen?

T: This: When we laugh at the idea of honor and are surprised when we are betrayed, when we joke at magnanimity and then complain about spite, when we insult those who tell the truth and then get hurt by a lie. We are only feeling the result of the vast philosophic project that has been going on now for over a century now. One that a much wiser person than I has called the Abolition of Man.

G: I see. How does one fix this?

T: Start caring. (Walks away)

Paul

Tanner Brunson

Always rushing,
Struggling to keep up with demands.
He's never been a multi-tasker,
But he has to learn fast.
He's built like tree.
His hair is dark, the color of coal,
and his eyes are a sharp contrast of blue.
The Applebee's uniform
doesn't fit him all that well,
So he wears a belt.
He's pleasant in person
But when he turns from them,
I catch him rolling his eyes.
He's seen me stare more than once,
but he says nothing, then
Or the next day
as he rushes off to class and I
write a paper.

Rain in the Park

Kristina Hemmerling

As the wind picked up and the trees and swings began to sway quicker, I turned to look at him across the table. I wanted to scream at him, to slap him, and at the same time I wanted to hug and kiss him.

His face didn't help. Still freckled, blue eyed, still beautiful. It wasn't fair. He hadn't changed and neither had I. So why this? Why now?

He wasn't looking at me, hadn't looked at me yet. Which was probably the most infuriating thing about him. He would confront his problems but never look them in the eye.

I gave a small cough to see if he would look at me. He startled and glanced at my mouth.

"Look, I don't want to prolong this. I'm not sure why things are this way, but somewhere along the line my feelings for you faded. It sucks and I feel like a jerk but that's the way it is. I can't change it."

All this talking and still no eye contact. He was driving me crazy. "Look at me when you speak to me. If you're going to break my heart here, then you may as well do me the favor of looking me in the eye."

Here. Why here? Why would he bring me here to do this? This exact picnic table where he had asked me to be his roughly two years ago. This park where we had come at three in the morning last December to watch a meteor shower. This set of trees that had given us shade as we kissed at the park instead of attending poetry class. This was ridiculous. Did he want to ruin this place for me?

"I don't know what else you want me to say." When he finished his lame sentence he looked at the area above my left ear. At least he was getting closer to my eyes.

I wanted him to tell me why. Tell me exactly when he knew he was done with me. Tell me how long he'd been planning to bring me here and do this to me. Tell me if he was ready to move on. Tell me with who.

But all I did was sigh. He was still sitting across from me, but I felt so alone.

"What?"

Apparently I looked like I wanted something. And then, as I was about to get angry at him for still being his presumptuous self, I realized we were making eye contact. For the first time in what felt like weeks. It probably had been weeks and I just hadn't noticed. Instead of being realistic I chose to ignore what was right in front of me. He was done. It was written all over his stupid, perfect face. He was done and I had to let him be. Two years of my life were about to mean nothing. They already did to him.

“Nothing. Just go. You don’t have to force yourself to be in my presence any longer.”

It was venomous and rude but I wanted him to know I was upset without keeping him here and telling him in so many words.

“How will you get back?”

How kind of him to wonder.

“I’ll walk. No need to pretend you’re concerned.” Childish, but I felt like a child who had just had her favorite toy taken from her.

His face contorted into anger. “Pretend I’m concerned? Just because I’m not in love with you anymore doesn’t mean I don’t care about you! God, you’ve always been like this. It’s all or nothing, but that’s not true! And you’ve never seen that. I still want you to be safe and happy. I just don’t think that us in a relationship will bring you that. It wasn’t making me happy anymore and no matter how you still feel about me, my feelings will end up affecting you. I know this is shit and we always said we’d never end up here, but here we are. I don’t have any specific reasons and there isn’t one instance that made me fall out of love with you. It just happened. We can sit here and discuss ways to fix things, but it’s too late. I don’t want to force anything and I think someone else, somewhere, will be able to make you happier than I can. I never wanted this to happen but it did.”

Without noticing, I had begun to cry as he berated me for being who I am. I’ve tried to change. Tried to be more clam and cool and care free. I’ve tried to work out my issues and just relax. But every time I do, even if I succeed, the fears and inhibitions always come back. And he hadn’t helped at all. No matter how much he reassured me I still feel the same way.

“You’re right. This sucks but if it’s what you want then I can’t change it.” My tears stopped and I wiped the residue off my face. “You can go. I’ll be fine walking back.”

He shook his head and looked at the sky. “But it’s about to storm.”

I sighed as he stood up. “Yeah but a little rain never killed anyone.”

He grabbed his book bag from the ground. “Sure, but lightning and tornadoes have, and it’s looking pretty bad up there.”

Then he stopped moving and looked at me. Just looked. My hair and eyes and gray sweatshirt he’d bought for me last fall. He took it all in.

It was almost like before, like when he still loved me.

But then he looked at his feet again and ruined it. So much hope can be built up from one look. Built up and torn down with one movement of a head.

He went back to looking at the spot above my left ear. “I am sorry. I don’t know how to make

you see that.”

I looked at him again. At the face that had made me smile for so long. For what seemed like a long time, anyway. I guess two years isn't much time in the grand scheme of things. One tenth of my life thus far. That's a rather small fraction.

“I'll figure it out eventually. Just go. The rain's about to fall.”

He looked me in the eyes again. “You sure? I really don't mind dropping you off. I don't want you to catch a cold or something.”

And I laughed. Not because his caring was funny but because the memory that came to me was. “Like freshman year during that flood? We played in the rain for hours that first day. God, that was fun. When you chased me and slipped and landed on your butt and got mud all over the back of your white shirt. That's my favorite.”

A smile that had started small grew as I spoke. “Ruined my shirt and my health in one afternoon. We were so sick after that. I never wanted to play in the rain again I was so miserable.”

That day was just after we had started dating. I think it was exactly a week later. It had been really dry for a while, and then it was like the sky broke and just kept dumping rain on us for days. I loved rain and splashing and flirting so it was a great day for me. And I didn't even mind being sick. I didn't think he had either. He was a good sport about it anyway.

“But we did. We went out again that spring and did almost the same thing.”

His smile widened. “True. And we didn't get sick that time. I guess it was worth it.”

I guess.

It seems so lame. A cop-out. I don't feel like fully forming an opinion so I'll say ‘I guess.’ He was always doing that when we'd try to make plans. Pizza? I guess. Movie? I guess. Homework? I guess. It was like he couldn't make a decision. He had only ever made two since I'd known him- to date me and to break up with me. How flattering.

A raindrop hitting my nose caused me to focus on the present issue again. “Well I think it was. But I just felt some rain so I guess you better head out.” And there I was, saying that dumb phrase.

He looked up at the ever-darkening sky. “Right. You totally positive about walking back? It looks like it's going to get pretty bad.”

Our reminiscing done, I just wanted him gone. It only left me with an empty feeling inside. A feeling I was sure to have for a while now. Had he not said he didn't want to prolong this? So why wouldn't he leave?

“Yes, yes. Now go. I need to be alone.”

He took a few steps towards his car and then stopped. “You know, the last time you said that we didn’t talk for a few days.” He paused, allowing me to remember. “Is it going to be like that again?”

We had known each other for a month and I had the biggest crush in the world on him. I thought he liked me, too. He texted me a lot and we spent all sorts of time together. But every weekend he would go out, get drunk, and make out with some girl that wasn’t me. Every weekend. Then one weekend it went too far. It was Sunday and we were doing homework in the lounge together and he was being abnormally quiet.

Finally I couldn’t take it anymore. “So what happened last night? You’re being weird.”

He kept looking at his math book. “I am? Well, I don’t know. I got pretty drunk last night. It was a good time.”

I only ever heard his friends say that when they got some girl to sleep with them. At that point, to my knowledge, he hadn’t yet done that.

“A good time?” I tried laughing but it sounded strangled. “What, are you DJ now?” His roommate said it all the time. He had sex a lot.

He laughed, only sounding marginally better than me. “I guess some of the guys would say so.”

Without saying it he had confirmed it. And my chest began to tighten and my eyes began to water. I coughed. “Oh. Well that’s... I thought you were a bit different than him.”

He was looking at the table now. “Me, too.” He said it so quietly I almost didn’t hear.

I swallowed the lump in my throat. I had to know. “I know it’s not my place, but I’m going to ask anyway. Who was it?”

His eyes closed and his head fell. He breathed out, hard. “Do we have to do this here?” There were a few other people at a table nearby. Did he think I was going to cause a scene?

“No.”

So we went to my room. By then tears were about ready to burst forth. I sat on my bed and he sat at my desk. Our usual seats, but they felt different.

He wasn’t looking at me and he still wasn’t talking. “So...”

I have this little purple spinning top my uncle gave me for my fifth birthday. I only ever have it out if I feel stressed and need something to look at to calm me. He pulled it out of my left desk drawer and spun it.

"El, I want you to know up front that I'm already regretting what happened. I regretted it as it was happening. It was not a good time. It was like I couldn't stop though." He was talking slowly and precisely. He didn't want to tell me but since he was he did it properly.

"I didn't even consider it until it was happening. We sometimes hang out when we're drinking because you never come out. And sometimes she does things that remind me of you. So I like to have her around. I guess last night she reminded me a lot of you. It was like she was doing it on purpose. All of your mannerisms and those words you use, she was doing it all. And we both got really drunk and somehow we ended up back at my room. And then we were talking on my bed. And then we were kissing." He closed his eyes as the top fell over.

"And then as quick as it began we were done and she was trying to snuggle but I kicked her out. El," he was the only one I let call me that. "It was Mina."

It was so much worse than I thought possible. Philomina, the girl who lived down the hall. The first person I met other than my roommate. The first person on campus who seemed to understand me. My best friend. And the one person who knew how I truly felt about him.

My chest began to cave in and I couldn't catch my breath. She knew and she did it anyway. He did it, and thought she was acting like me? So many things were implied, but it didn't matter. He had had sex with my best friend. I wanted to scream and yell and hide in my bed and cry forever. How could she have done this to me? She wanted to snuggle after? Why did he do it? And why now, when my feelings for him were so strong? Why not sooner, when it wouldn't have hurt as bad?

"Evan, I need to be alone."

I sounded strangely calm.

He looked at me for the first time that day. His eyes wide, his mouth a worried line. "We can talk. We need to talk, actually. I have a lot to tell you. First of which is that I'm sorry," his words fell into one another.

I put up my hand. "Stop. I can't talk to you right now. You need to go."

His face hurt me to look at it was so sad. Mine felt cold and expressionless. I could tell he wanted to say more, to stay, make me feel better. But he could tell I didn't want it. He hung his head and grabbed his books.

When he was at the door, facing out, he said, "Let me know when you're ready to talk. I'll be waiting," and shut the door.

I'd been waiting for weeks, now he was going to wait? Right, well he was going to wait a while.

I waited a week before talking to him again. I guess I couldn't make him wait much longer. I didn't want to. He was so apologetic. He told me it was a mistake. That he was crazy about me. That he had been since we met but he'd been too nervous. That he wasn't going to drink anymore. That he hadn't since. That he missed me and the time we spent together. That he hoped at some point I could trust him enough to date him.

I sat at the park remembering that. How it felt to be betrayed by my best friend. To be liked and to have him fuck someone else. How it felt to get over it, to still like him. To be with him.

This was nothing like that. Instead of trying to fix things he was leaving me. Maybe I wouldn't talk to him for a while. Maybe it would be never. But that was fine because I didn't have to. He was dumping me, so why would it matter if we talked after? Because he still cared? Well, that's nice but it doesn't really matter. Being friends is nice but it wasn't what I want. I wanted him, and not as a friend. So maybe if I couldn't have him how I wanted I didn't want him at all. Except it wasn't true. I'd still see him around, still have to interact with him.

"No, I think this will be different."

He turned to look at me, a small smile on his face. "Okay cool I'll see you on campus, then."

See you on campus. How far we had come.

As he walked toward his car I could see it all. Him moving on and dating someone new. Eventually forgetting about me and getting married. Having kids and a life that I'll never know about.

Thunder rumbled as he started his car. As his lights blinked on there was a flash of lightning. Heavier rain began to fall, instantly soaking me as he drove away.

I wondered if I wanted to cry. I thought I would. The person whom I had thought was the love of my life just broke up with me. I thought I would be devastated. I was, but I wasn't reacting in the manner I had expected. Rain was drenching me, chilling me all through. The sky was dark and occasionally forced open by lightning. A strong wind bore through the trees, knocking down leaves. It was the perfect weather for someone who had had her heart broken.

But it didn't fit right. I didn't need the cold rain, thunder and lightning, and gusts of wind. It was fine, but sunny sky and chirping birds would have been just as well. Maybe this was what closure felt like. Sad but okay. Over but still able to move forward.

Evan was my first real boyfriend, my first real kiss, my first love. But all of that was done now. When he first brought it up I felt angry and horrible and broken. But we had talked. And I had remembered. And it didn't seem so bad, storm and all.

When I finally stood to leave the park, the rainfall had almost stopped. Sun was peaking out at random behind the thinning gray cloud cover. The trees were calmed and the puddle at the base of the slide was still with very few droplets disturbing it.

I took it all in and thought of all the times I'd been here in the past two years, all of them with Evan. All of them good, happy. But not this one. This one was just done.

Waking Up Late

Gloria Leonard

If I hadn't slept through my alarm
After a night of being covered more by paperwork
Than my sheets. Then, maybe, I would have an
Ironed shirt and I would have had breakfast,
And I wouldn't have missed my train.
Then, maybe, I wouldn't be on this bus that stopped
One too many times to assure I'd be at work on time.
And if only I had not looked up to find brown eyes
Staring right back into mine and then a smile that met
The depths of their irises. Then, maybe, you wouldn't
Be making your way to the seat next to mine and this
Shirt wouldn't be too tight, this bus wouldn't be too hot
And my cheeks wouldn't be too red.

Nothing to turn my day around—
I could lose my job, all the hours I've put in,
The sleepless nights and rushed mornings,
And a paycheck that nowhere near reflected
How dedicated I am.
If I hadn't had this shitty morning,
Then, maybe, I wouldn't be sitting in this coffee
Shop, jobless, but enjoying the breakfast I missed.
And I wouldn't be sitting across brown eyes
And a smile and a perfectly chiseled jaw.
Then, maybe, I wouldn't be waking up late
Next to you.

Girl With Freckles

Katie Davisson

Everyone calls me pizza face
Or strawberry cheeks
And of course there's freckles

They're all so original
And they always think they're so clever
So smart, that they can't
Even take a second to look past the marks on my face

They don't know that I love animals
Or that I got my eyes from my great-great grandmother
And they definitely don't know that I hate the color orange
Because it reminds me of pumpkin pie

Pumpkin pie reminds me of Thanksgiving
Thanksgiving reminds me of the week my parents died
In a car crash, on the way to my grandmother's
Over the river and through the woods

All they see are my freckles
Each little mark,
Apparently describing the secrets of my soul
Judging a book before even reading a page

McDonald's: Light and Dark

Alycia Tassone

Light

As I cheerfully approach the excellent eatery, the golden arches glow like the sun on a glistening summer day. A vibrant myriad of diners gather at the dazzling ruby-colored picnic tables. On these faces, smiles are shining brightly. Inside, people are contentedly munching on their fries and savoring their sandwiches. The merriment of these patrons fills the dining room. It is a pleasantly satisfying vision. The delicious fragrance of freshly cooked potatoes tingles my nostrils. Families laugh together while fulfilling their appetites; children clutch their new toys gleefully. The delectable aroma of freshly brewed coffee wafts through the restaurant making everyone crave some of the hot, luscious liquid. A joyous woman sits chatting with a companion, sipping a soothing cup of hot chocolate. From the pleasant worker behind the counter, a tremendously excited youngster happily receives a tall, snow-white ice cream cone, jumping for joy as she returns to the loving smiles of her family. A jolly elderly gentleman hums a tune—a tune with a calming melody that soothes everyone's hearts. The glow of the sun oozes in the windows, creating shapes on the tables all around the room. The comforting warmth of the dining room relaxes the people as they partake in a fast, easy, and delicious meal. Behind the counter, I commence my job that day—bagging the fresh food for fast-paced customers through the drive-thru. Everyone and everything seems calm, relaxed, and complete after the cessation of their glorious afternoon dining under the arches. They loved it!

Dark

As I dreadfully drag myself toward the wretched house of sickening grease, the ghastly glare of the arches pierces my eyes. A chaotic riot of ravenous people surround the blood-red tables, scratched of their paint by hundreds of rebellious teens and their bikes. Scowls of fury protrude from their faces like ferocious bears on a manhunt. Inside this house of horror, people pull their faces from the taste of pure grease. The disgust on many faces displays the customers' dissatisfaction. It is a waste of money. The pungent stench of fry grease overtakes the entire restaurant. Families attempt to have a decent meal, but they must return their food because it was made incorrectly. People shout in anger and disgust at the inability of the workers to make it right the first time. The putrid odor of anciently brewed coffee blends with the unpleasant smell of espresso, black as motor oil. A small, innocent child demands a different toy from the one last week. Groups of grouchy men grumble and nitpick every little detail about the place and the people in it. A grumpy old man drones on about nothing in particular. The glaring sun punctures through the smeared windows, blinding people

like a deer caught in the headlights on a pitch-black night. The blazing heat scorches everyone in the dining room, making them sweat from the unbearable temperature, never comfortable, never satisfying, never right. Behind the counter, jumbles of immature “workers” loaf around without a clue in the world of what to do. Agonizing beeping from the grills will not cease as no one wants to move their lazy butts to turn it off. Throbbing, the pounding in my head will not quit. Everyone seems completely out of tune with the world around them. People feel irritated and annoyed at the lack of good dining they are presented. They all seem to despise the unwholesome, noxious diet, yet every day, they keep coming back for more.

Like Mother, Like Daughter

Megan Atwood

He gets home from work,
Kicking off his shoes,
Dropping his briefcase by the front door.
The kitchen air smells of garlic and tomato;
I'm making pasta for dinner.
I hear him sigh,
As he picks up the newspaper,
Sitting down at his seat at our small table for two.
He doesn't say a word to me.
I silently finish my spaghetti sauce;
Cooking my mother's recipe to perfection.
It's almost time to taste test,
And add her last "secret" ingredients.
Grabbing the parmesan cheese and a gallon of milk out of the fridge.
I walk to the cupboard above the microwave,
Selecting my favorite blue and white dining set.
The set we picked together.
Placing a cup of milk, fork, knife, and a full plate of pasta in front of him,
We meet each other's eyes and force a smile.
He loves my spaghetti.
That's why I make it.
As I bring my plate to the table,
We begin to eat. Silently.
In silence I take note of the soft bubbling of my pan on the stove,
And the buzz of the refrigerator.
I hear him sigh once more as he scrapes his fork on his plate.
It won't be long now.
He slurps the few final strands of angel hair pasta into his dirty mouth.
I hear him swallow as he washes it down with the rest of his milk.
He only drinks two percent.
I wipe my face with a paper towel;

Watching him.
He smiles contently,
Placing his folded hands on his belly;
His stomach full of my perfect spaghetti.
Little does he know it's the last meal we'll ever share together.
Choking he falls to the floor.
Slamming his fist on the table,
He grabs for his empty cup of milk.
The glass shatters on the floor next to him.
Maybe he should think twice about returning home in those clothes.
The smell of her sweet perfume on his dress shirt,
And the red lipstick stains on his collar.
I smile, satisfied with what I accomplished;
Remembering the huge diamond studs on his nightstand,
A pair of movie ticket stubs to a show we never saw;
The bottle of flavored lube in his underwear drawer,
Next to his dusty, golden wedding band.
Revenge is sweeter than you ever were.

The Boy

Katie Davisson

So. There's this boy. He's tall. He has yellow hair. He has freckles on his nose and eyes that sparkle when I talk. He likes it when I talk. He knows a lot of things. He knows when the moon is going to be full and what happens when stars die. He tells me the sun rises in the "East" and sets in the "West." He tells me what the "East" and "West" are. I haven't known him long, but he's very nice.

There was this one day when we went to the park. He talked about the birds and the bees and how the bees fly from flower to flower taking yellow dust with them and it makes more flowers. He told me how the birds fly "South" (the "wife" of "North" who are the "neighbor" to "East" and "West" I just don't know how) when frozen water falls from the sky. He said the frozen water is called "snow" and that it happens in "winter." He told me "winter" is a "season", and there are four of them in a year. He told me there are a lot of days in a year. I can't recall how many.

He knows a lot. He talks a lot.

I like it when he talks.

He told me his name, but I forgot it. It's a weird name, a long name, uses a lot of letters. He explained what letters were and how they help make words. I've learned a lot of new words. I can't retain the long one's, though. They always leave my mind when I fall into the dark. He calls it "sleep", falling into the dark. He calls the dark "night" and when the big bright ball shines he calls that "day." Day is too light for me, I like night much better. When we "sleep" he lays on a flat, soft surface that he says is a "bed." He lets me sleep on a kind of "bed" but it has arms that tuck me in a night. He calls it a "couch."

Sometimes all these words are too much and I just like to stare at him. I think he likes it when I stare. His face lights up like the sun and the little white pearls in his mouth (he says they're called "teeth") show. I like when his "teeth" show, it gives me a warm and fuzzy feeling. When I stare he makes this noise. It's not like anything I have heard before, but it's not a bad noise. In fact, it's a noise that makes me very happy. It makes me want to make the noise with him. He says it's called "laughing."

Laughing is fun. He is fun. I like him. He told me he liked me.

Maybe we could just like each other forever and forget about everyone else and just stay quiet and not use so many words all the time... but I like it when he talks. Maybe he and I could just talk about all the words in the world until I know all the words he knows.

Maybe. Just maybe.

21st Birthday

Matt Hess

I just got up.
Well, now, that's a lie,
I'm still in bed.
I went too hard,
For a Thursday night.
I've been popping aspirin,
Like it's my job.
There isn't enough water
In the world to quench my thirst.
Rum and Cokes go down,
Easier than they come up.
It might be All Saints Day,
But I am in Hell.
Dante, what circle might this be?
Wake me up when it's all over.

The Meta Problem

Thomas Day

If I ponder upon the lay of life,
I often slip, and think of thinking instead.
That one true issue, as I lie in bed,
to contemplate contemplation, I do mistake.
To make Thoughts my aim, nay Truth to take
The fruits of which, that I desire,
And cast them into that mental fire.
I oft presume; What do I know?
The idea, soon returns, How can
I think and truly think and not to
think about thinking? How then
can Truth come out, if all it is, is a show?
To think then is thus, before my clothes I rent.
The best way to know is by accident.

Solitude

Jennie Weer

I stare at the screen,
Acting like I'm writing a paper or researching history,
But I'm only playing a game.
I'm clicking cards all by myself.
I'm singing a solo.
And that's okay
Because I like solitude.

I Need To Know

Tanner Brunson

Three words, that's all.
Just three little words
that tell me I'm not being stupid.
I don't need promises you can't keep yet.
I don't even need a ring.
I just need to hear one thing.

I can be your Jessica Rabbit,
or maybe Marilyn Monroe.
I'd even walk over a vent
just to hear you tell me
that I make your blood rise
That would be a nice surprise.

No other boy will catch my eye
not even Franklin or Grant,
Starving artist or hit sensation.
I'll stay by your side to the end
There's just one thing you need to do,
And that's to say: I love you.

Cloudy With A Chance of Blue

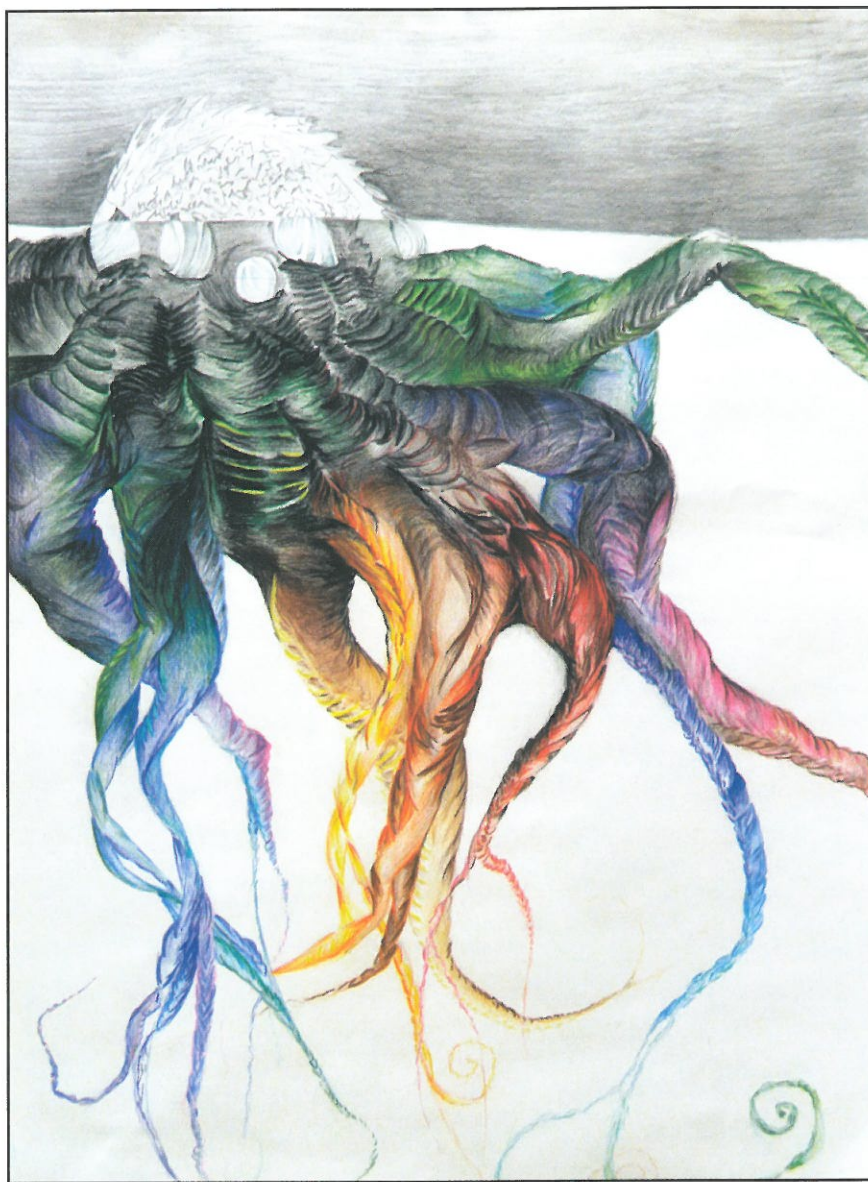
Nicole Thomsen

Since May of last year, I have worked for the Prussian Blue Paints. It all happened because one day I was walking through our local community college art department when I noticed one of the Prussians on the ground. His tube was withered and wrinkled and his suit was covered in at least six other colors. He had a puncture wound in his back. He had been stabbed by a Viridian Green. Fortunately I got there in time to patch him up, I have quick steady hands so I took a roll of scotch tape and cautiously wrapped the wound. I set the man on a table and waited with him until he woke up. After a couple of hours he finally came around. He told me his name was Benny P. I asked what the P stood for and he told me Prussian, I then asked if all the Prussian's have the last name of Prussian and he said no. In that moment I realized I had just saved a somebody, a big Prussian Blue somebody. Benny said he was in charge of the entire hue. Apparently the Prussians owned all of oceans, lake, man-made lakes and they just recently bought out ponds from the Forest Greens. Their goal is to own every body of water on this earth.

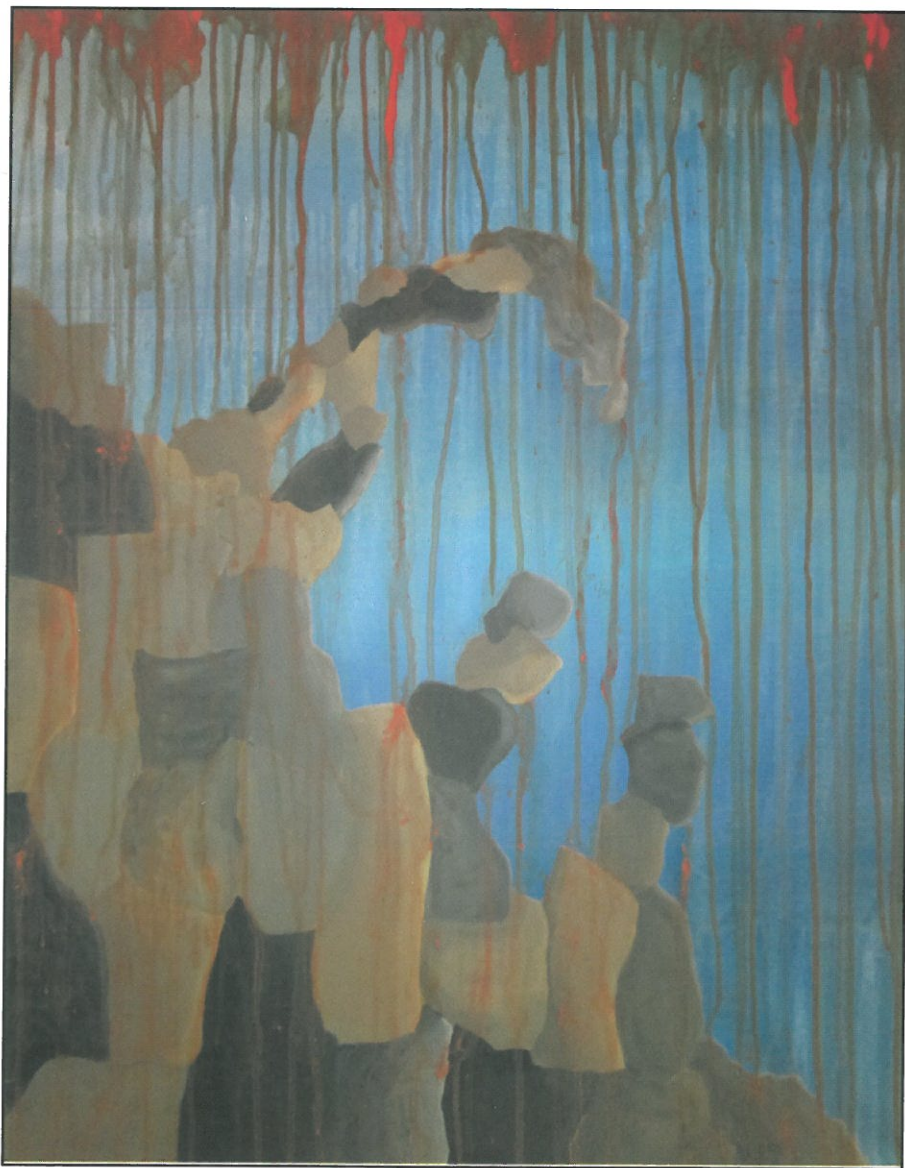
Benny and I spoke for quite some time when out of the blue he offered me to be his personal assistant. He said he couldn't pay in cash, as he was just stabbed by one of the greens, he'd be able to write me a weekly check for twice of what I make at the Piggly Wiggly. I couldn't turn the man down. We got to work the next morning.

My Job consisted of finding large and even sometimes tiny bodies of water that the Prussian's didn't already own. Then it hit me, why stop with the oceans? Why don't we reach for the sky, literally? I gave my proposal to Benny and said he wasn't really sure if anyone owned the sky, he said that the Titanium White had the clouds and Charcoal Grey had just bought some of that company but no one really owned the sky. Benny used to know a guy or two from the Titanium Whites, the cloud guys, he said he put in a good word with them and see what he could do.

It's been six months since the proposal. Not only do the Prussians own the sky and the waters they are working on adding some blue to winds and to every fire! We're expanding rather rapidly, and I was given a raise. Benny and I took care of the Viridian Green that stabbed him, let's just say he's at the bottom of a very blue ocean. Benny and I have recently been trying to come up with a new slogan. I went with, "Why not blue?" Benny said it was okay but he thinks I'm capable of coming up with something a little better, something a little more blue.



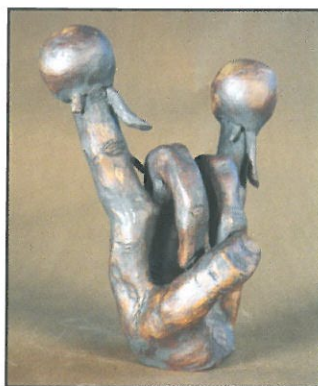
Samantha Rains, *My Alter Ego*, colored pencil and graphite



Kristina Hemmerling, *Peaking Disappointment*, acrylic



Shalom Paulino, *Fall*, acrylic



Brendon Varallo, *Three Forms*, stoneware clay



Anastasia Marsh, *Untitled* stoneware clay



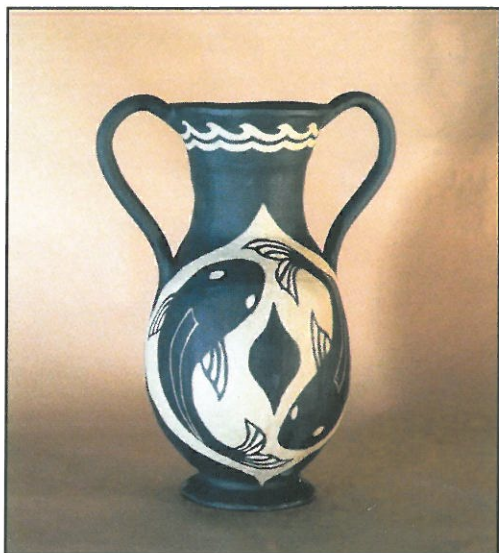
Nicole Thomsen, *Borgias Beauty*, digital photography



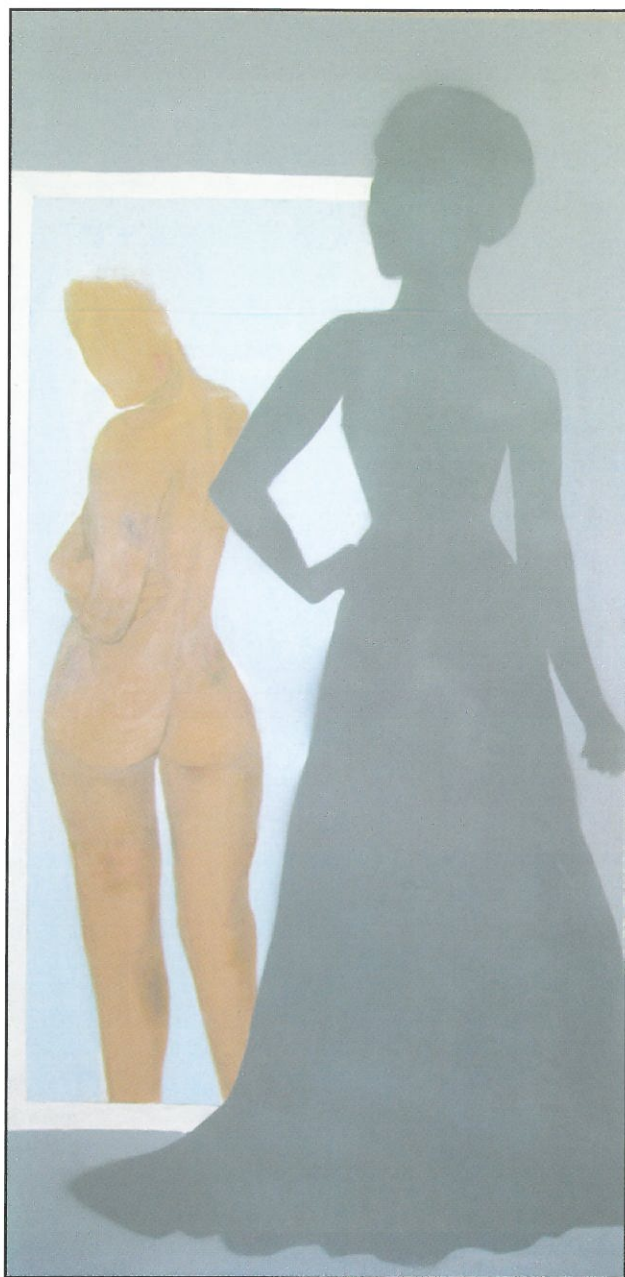
Carla Luzadder, *Vanitas Still Life*, acrylic



Shayna Polomchak, *Skeletons*, digital photography



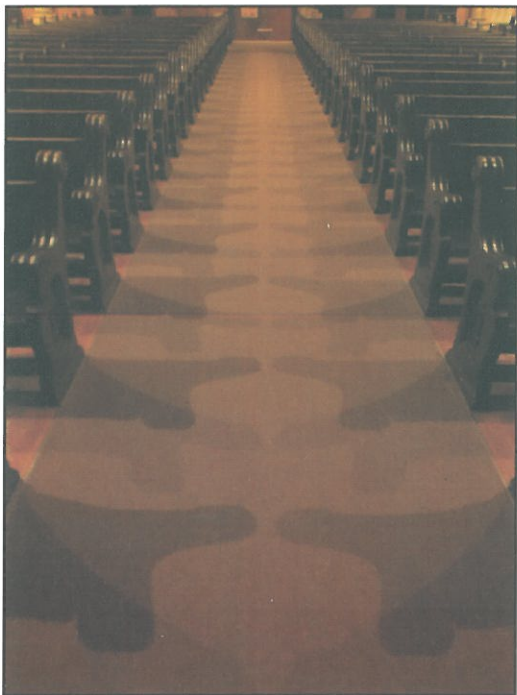
Katelyn Gigl, *Greek Amphora*, black slip on stoneware



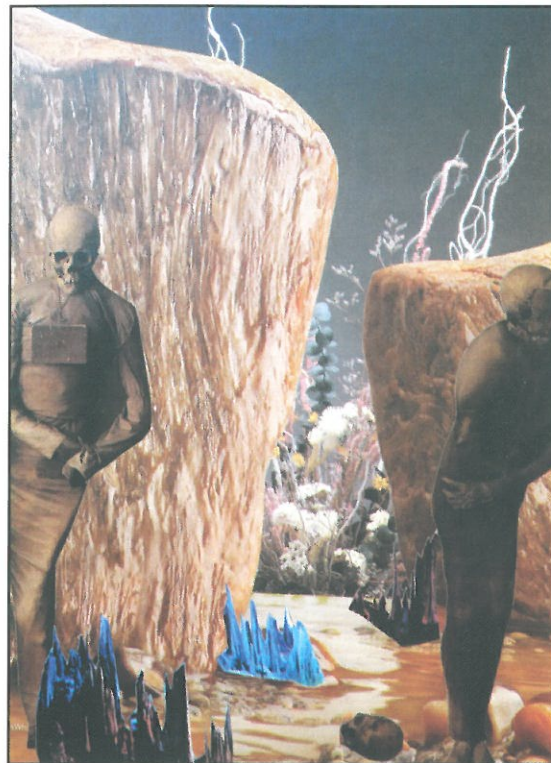
Gloria Leonard, *My Bruised Reflection*, acrylic



Bonnie Zimmer, *Vessel for Dad* (two views), natural and found objects, waxed linen



Matt Hess, *The Path*, digital photography



Corey Crum, *Blood Brothers*, collage



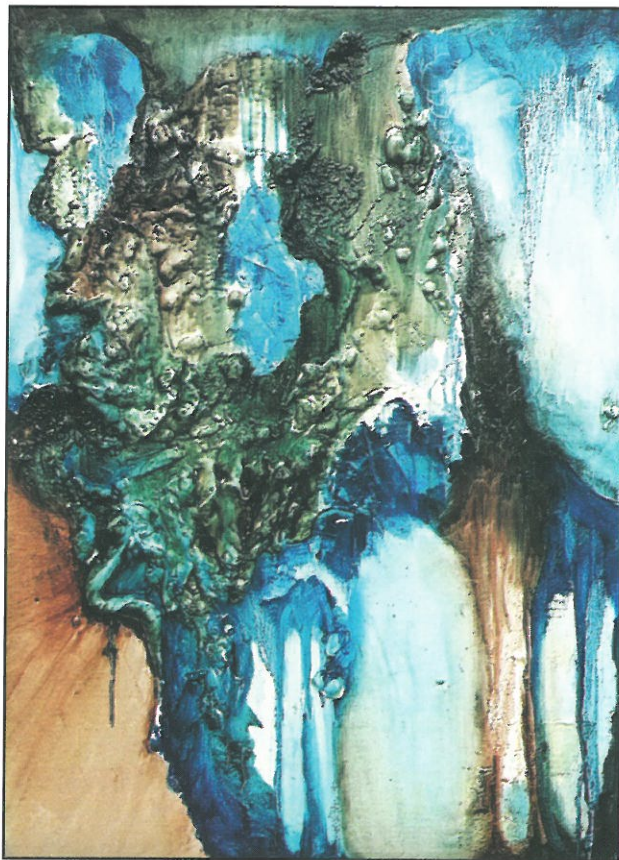
Judy Kanne, *Emotive Composition*, acrylic



Nicole Thomsen, *Vanitas Still Life*, oil on canvas



Ashley Brinkman, *The Green Movement*,
acrylic on canvas



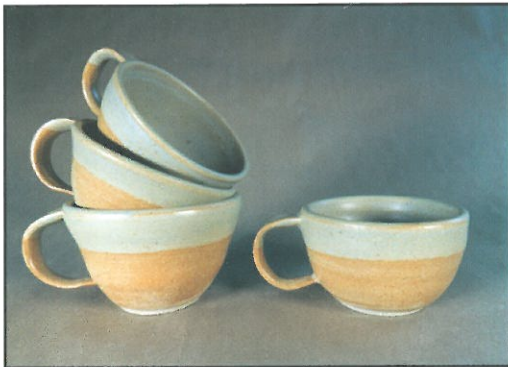
Nicole Thomsen, *The Bretish is Commin*, mixed media



Corey Crum, *One Orange, One Lemon, One Opossum Skull*, oil on canvas



Bonnie Zimmer, *Goddess Vessel*,
milkweed pod, cotton string



Katelyn Gigl, *Teacup Series*, ceramics



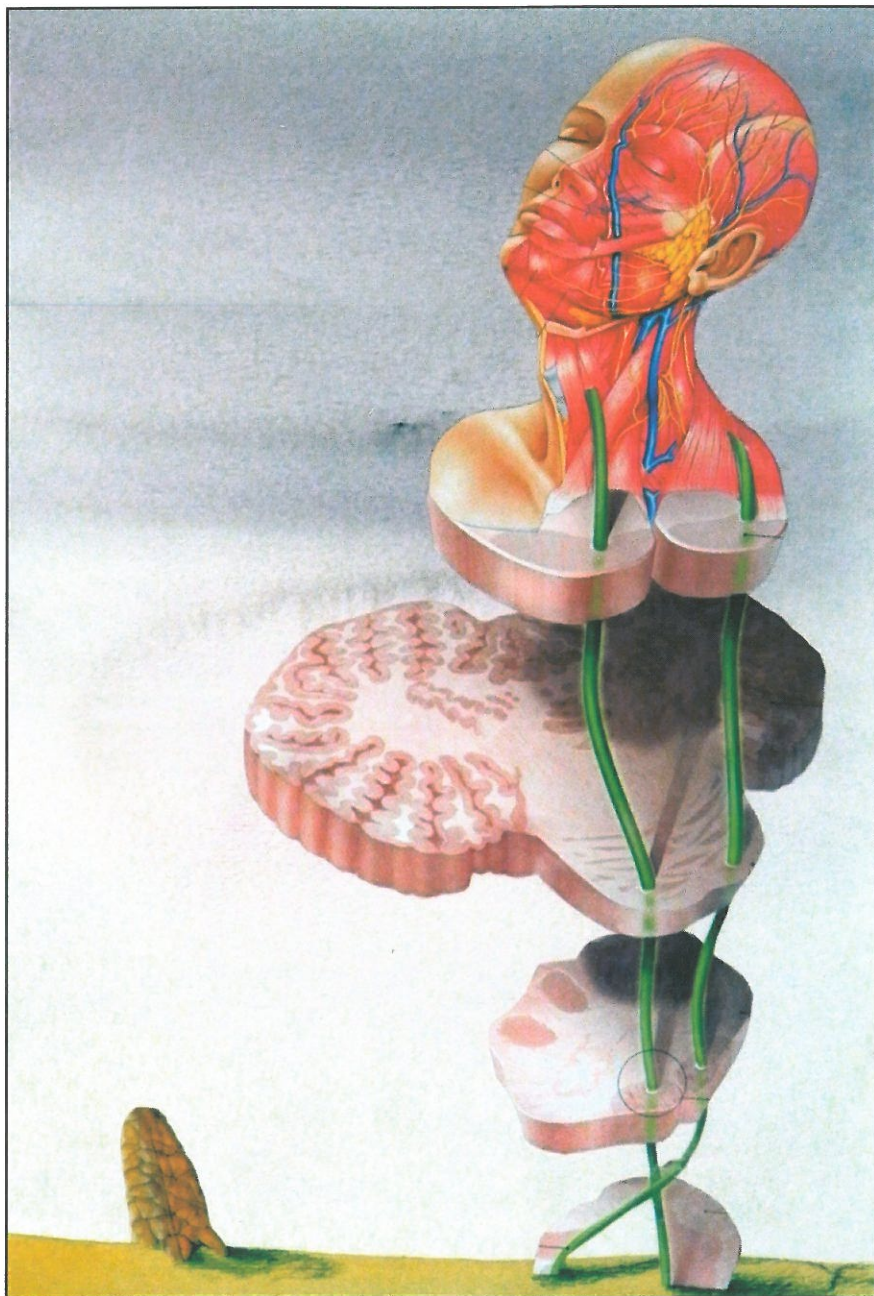
Alyssa Guarnaccia, *Owl*, digital photography



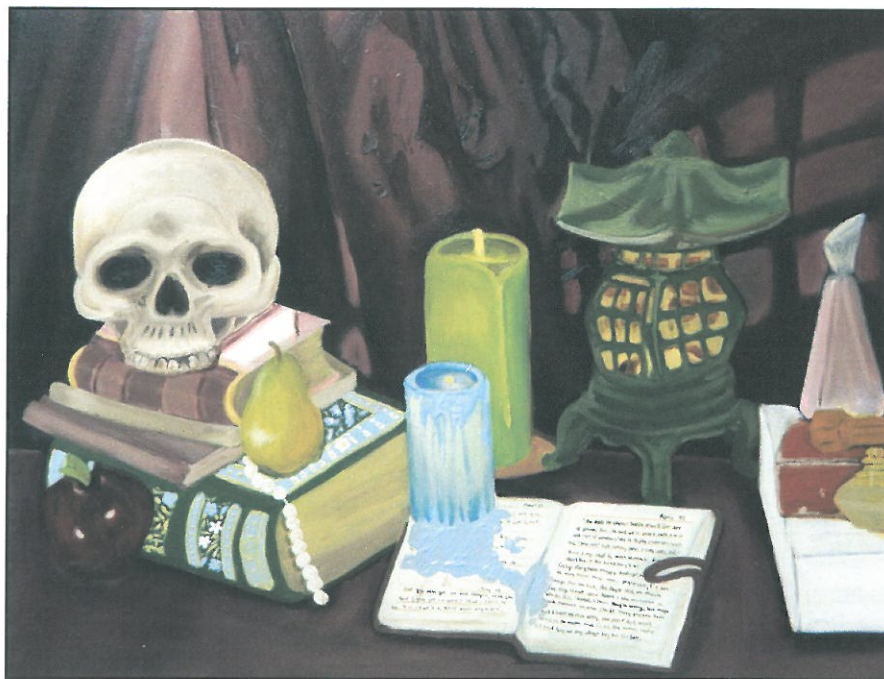
Amanda Duncan, *Nature's Disaster*, acrylic



Bonnie Zimmer, *Blight Vessel II*, *Industrial Agriculture Series* (two views), natural and found materials, plastic cable ties, wax, linen string



Corey Crum, *Untitled*, mixed media



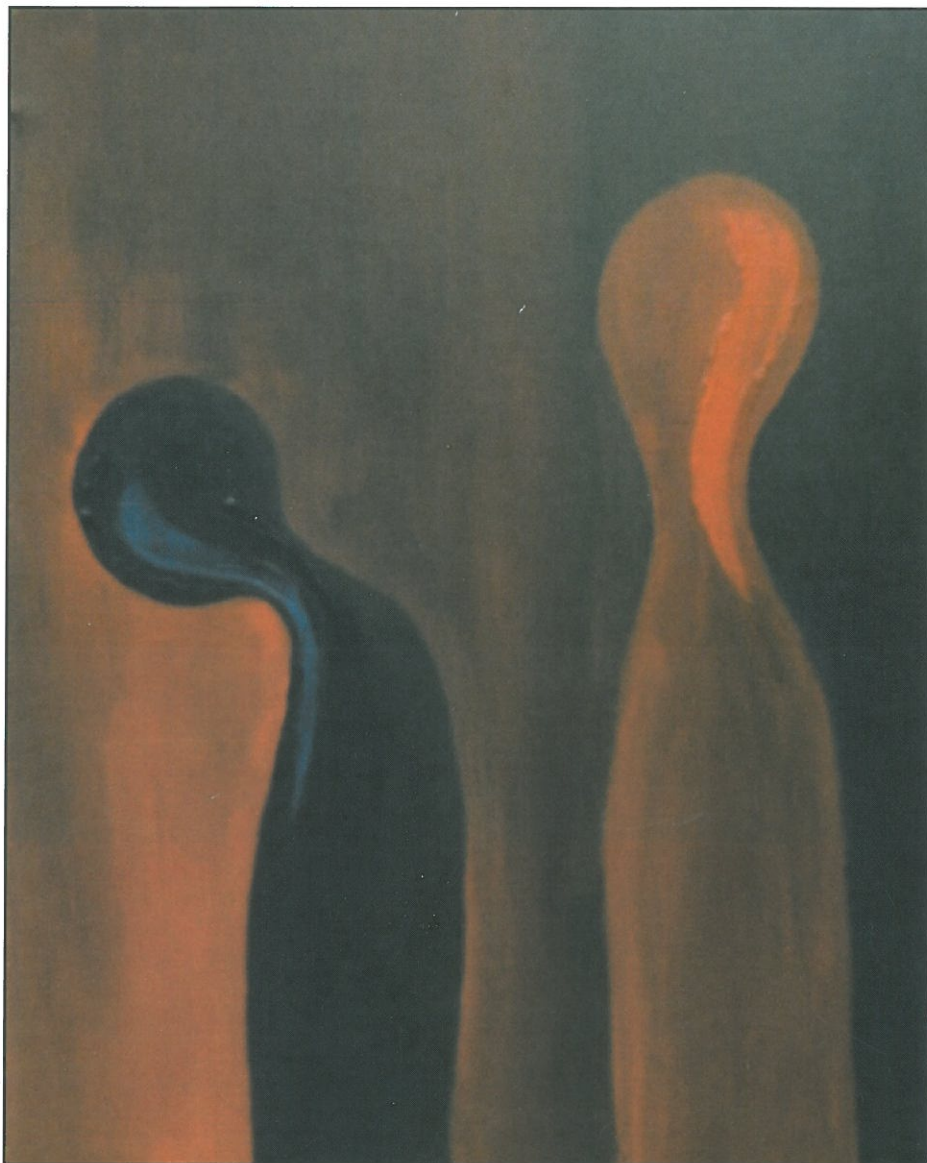
Gloria Leonard, *Vanitas Still Life*, oil on canvas



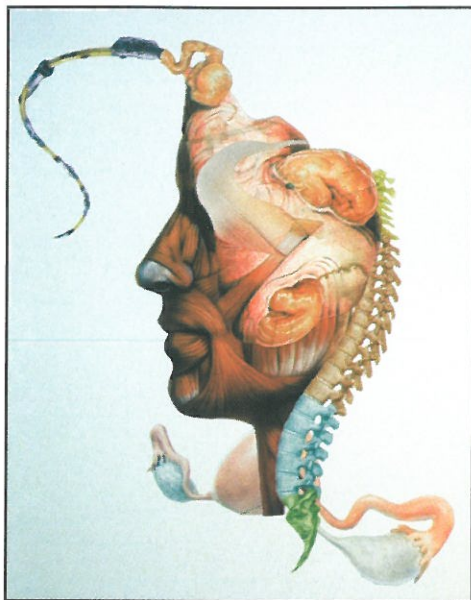
Shalom Paulino, *The Hope of Friendship Still*, mixed media 12" x 24"



Yemi Ogunbameru, *Alter Ego*, mixed media



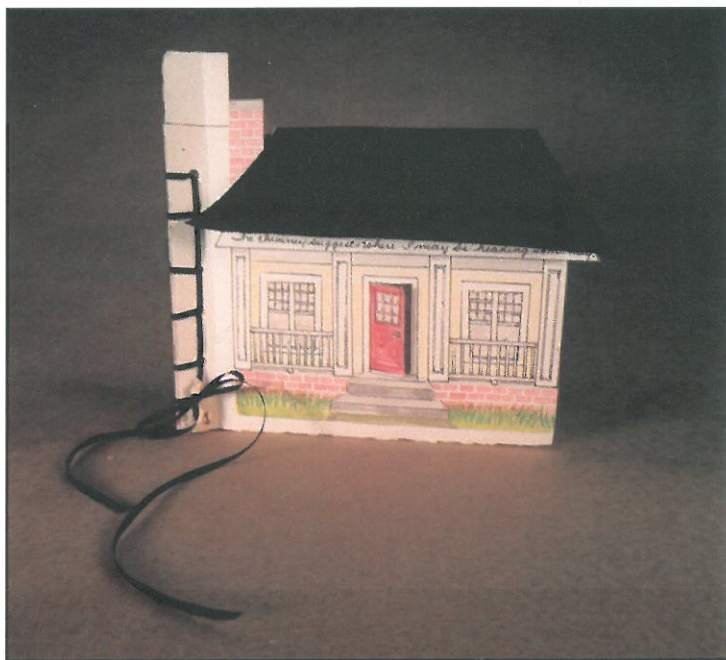
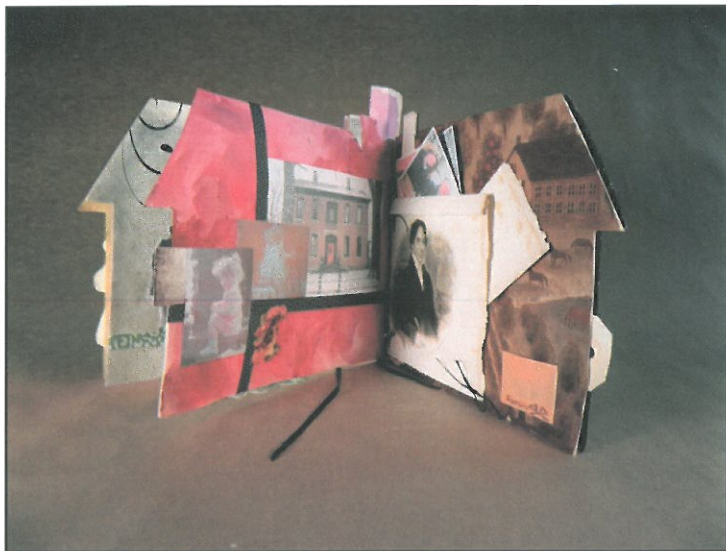
Kristina Hemmerling, *Broken Promises*, acrylic



Corey Crum, *My Favorite Secret*, mixed media



Sarah Beetz, *Cold Winter Memories (Stencil Assignment)*, acrylic and spray paint



Judy Kanne, *Autobiographical House Book*, mixed media



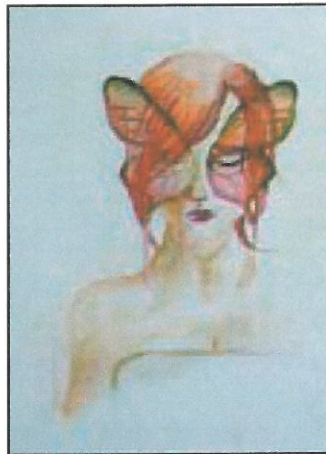
Will Decker, *Initial Eruption*, mixed media
6' x 2' x 3"



Nicole Thomsen, *Mermaid*, mixed media, 8'x 54"x 2"



David Herriot, *Cat Woman*, mosaic



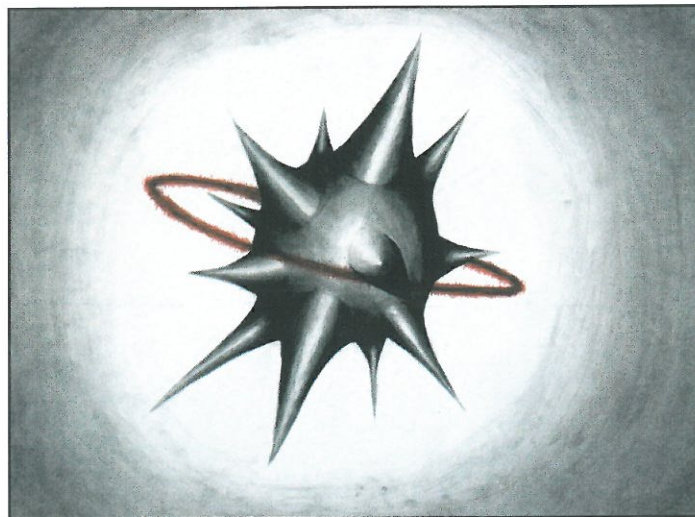
Shayna Polomchak, (from left to right) *Dreamland III, IV, V*, watercolor



Kristina Hemmerling, *Where You Least Expect It*, acrylic



Leann Kooi, *Alter Ego*, mixed media



Daniel Davis, *Untitled*, charcoal



Alyssa Guarnaccia, *Ganges River: Varanasi, India*, digital photography

Gym Rat

Adam Stutzman

There is a specific name for the men who walk into the gym,
Saggy sweat pants, with a tank top tucked in.
Some come in carrying their duffle,
It's a new day so let's hit a new muscle.
They walk in with a sense of pride,
Lifting weights is their way of getting high.
They always bring a friend along they can trust,
They both love the smell of sweat, and the feeling of rust.
They will think of new lifts because they're quite clever,
But nothing beats the sound of some 45's banging together.
Every single set they do is in front of a mirror,
It is not to check themselves out, but to prevent error.
They like to throw the weights after they are done,
And they all agree that legs day is no fun.
When they're feeling strong, they like to do curls,
They all know that curls, get the pretty girls.
When someone says cardio, they don't even blink
Cardio is that shit that will make your muscles shrink.
They read different articles and new found theories,
So they run to the store to grab Hawthorne Berries.
They'll take their vitamins and their magic elixirs,
When their hands hurt, they know it's just some more blisters.
They are the men who slam plates to get dates,
They will always ask, "bro, are you using these weights?
When these men are done lifting, get out of their way,
They must hurry home, to drink some more Whey.
These are the men who eat more after they're full,
Cuz come on bro, aren't you trying to get swole?
These are the men building muscle and burning fat,
These are the guys we all call, a gym rat

Writing a Letter to Your Dead Mother and Other Things Normal People Don't Do

Randee Portteus

Dear Mom,

Today, it's been eight years. But you knew that (know that?) already. Around this time, the house always gets quiet. Dad drinks his beer at night and stares at the TV, but he's paying as much attention as I am to the homework that's spread out in front of me on the coffee table. November hits, and Dad and I turn into zombies, moving quietly and robotically around each other, staring through people, and dreading this day. It's like you die again every year.

Do you know any of this is going on?

Of course not. That's silly.

Did you know, when you died, that one in fifteen people will develop a brain aneurysm in the U.S.? My question is, why wasn't it one of the other fourteen people? Why did you have to develop this thing, this weak spot on a blood vessel that ruptured and caused a hemorrhagic stroke? I looked this stuff up when I was thirteen and managed to finally spell "aneurysm" right. It took a while. I wasn't always the best speller, and the misspelling was enough to deter me from finding out more about what killed you.

The most common causes of a brain aneurysm are smoking and having a relative with a brain aneurysm. When my friend Chelsea started smoking a cigarette once on our walk home, I snatched it out of her lips even though it was lit. I swore and dropped it, smashing it under my sneaker. Chelsea was less than amused. I spent a week smearing burn cream on my palm and dodging angry looks from Chels, until I explained and she softened a little. I still catch her smoking occasionally, but I can't blame her for trying to cope.

Sometimes I worry that the same thing is growing in my brain and that one day it will just – POP! And I'll be gone, or suffer brain damage of some sort. Sometimes I wonder if that would be so bad, and then our teachers talk about how we are the most privileged people in the world and I'm ashamed for thinking that just because I've lost my mother.

Of course, those third-world countries suffering from starvation and genocides and terrible, terrible things doesn't make it any easier to dress shop with my dad, or have to as Mrs. G, Chelsea's mom, to take me to buy a bra because I'm scared to go alone. It was still hard to learn to French braid my own hair. I cried every time I tried, usually ending up with a rat's nest on my head and crying in my dad's arms. It was confusing to discover I'd started my period, even worse to stand

in the grocery store aisles and try to figure out whether to choose pads or tampons. If I could have even made that decision, it wouldn't have mattered because I didn't know the difference between overnight and super and long and light. All of it was confusing to me. Then came boys, fights with my friends, high school. Now as a junior, I do well enough, keep my head above water, and maintain a C average.

But it's rather like living without my right arm.

I cope well enough. But then November, inevitably, comes around every year and shuts my dad and I down. We emerge somewhere around January, shaking off the tinsel and glitter of Christmas, seeing each other for the first time in two months, and move on functionally for another ten months before we start to shut down again.

Today is the very day you died when I was eight, half of my lifetime ago. I skipped school today without my dad's knowledge, but he wouldn't care even if he knew. Today, Dad and I avoid each other, avoid eye-contact because it'll just end up hurting one of us to see the other. It's really not worth it. After I listened to my dad get ready for work and then leave the house, I got out of bed, wandered around the house in my sweats and a t-shirt, and drank the cold coffee my dad left on the counter.

I did melodramatic things like sigh and stare out the window because I was at a loss. I would turn and each time something would catch my eye that reminded me of you. The maple tree out front that you planted, turned a gorgeous burgundy color. The stove was messy from my cooking like it never was when you made dinner for dad and I. The cat, the one you always talked about getting but never did, the one that dad got from the animal shelter just days after your funeral.

After flipping through TV channels a while, I realized that I wasn't absorbing any information at all. I knew what I wanted to do. So I put on jeans and started walking. The day was gray and chilly as I walked to the cemetery. Everything kind of blended together: the sky and the dead grass, the headstones and the winding roads between and through them. Yours is near the back, did you know that? As soon as I saw it, I was a little girl in pigtails holding my dad's hand and biting my fist to keep from crying. I'm sitting with you now, on slightly damp grass soaking slowly through my jeans. I don't particularly care.

It's so dark to think that your body, the arms that held me, the hair that swept around your face, are buried six feet underneath where I sit now. I wonder if your soul is buried six feet under, too, or if it's gone on to another place. Dad and I don't go to church anymore. We used to try, but it became too much, another place with too many memories of you and too many people who slowly

stopped asking if we were okay, though we weren't. Thinking of you and who you were is something that is too hard for me to think about often.

I start to a lot, but then quickly shy away.

How do you answer the question, "What happens after you die?" when you think of a loved one? It's too hard, too biased, too tender to think about. It hurts because if you're wrong what do you do? Imagine that the person that was the world to you is just nothing, POOF! Never existed, and only exist now in your mind.

And I'm the one writing a letter to my dead mother.



Ashley Brinkman, *Skull* , charcoal

School Poems

Kristina Hemmerling

Sometimes I wonder
Why I'm here.
I like reading and writing and art
But are my majors going to help me
Get a job
A career
Be happy in life?
I really don't know.
But I'm still here.

I don't even enjoy it
All that much.
Sometimes I think I could be doing
Most of these things
Without spending so much.
But the atmosphere wouldn't be the same
And as much as,
At times,
I hate it
I know I would feel
Like I was missing out.

All I want to do
Is write.
And maybe paint on the side.
I could edit
To help make a living.
But I just want
To write.
Be the next JK Rowling
Write the next big thing.

But I don't think
I'm good enough.
And I don't think
Anyone will take any interest
In what I write.
So I don't think
I'll get to do
What I want.
Which is write.

Toxic Toothbrush

Tabitha Blaisdell

Brushing, spitting, and repeating.
Nobody can know that she's slipped.
She cups her hands over her mouth and exhales,
Not one trace of alcohol left behind.

She has a toxic relationship with her toothbrush.
Her mouth may be clean,
But she's living a dirty lie.
That toothbrush is another wretched utensil,
Keeping her from a sober life.

Time will tell
The hospital bed is where she sits
She shivers and shifts,
As the nurse puts the bracelet upon her wrist
She hopes it goes well
She's not ready to die

Cracked

Nicole Thomsen

The last few nights I've had the same dream or nightmare about a horse. I'm at a carnival or maybe a circus I can't really tell the difference, the colors are so vivid. There are greens, like summer-grass-that-is-watered-everyday-even-in-a-drought-greens, they're alive; and the sky is bright and it's blue but not a normal blue, it's blue like when-I-was-twelve-and-we-went-to Hawaii-and-I-saw-the-water-for-the-first-time-and-it-was-so-bright-and-see-through-and-aqua-and-blinding-but-I couldn't-look-away-blue. The horse in the dream is tall, strong, she knows me very well, we have chemistry. I'm with my best friend, Rachel; we walk side by side. But I'm texting, and I don't remember the first text I sent but I can feel myself waiting. I want the reply to come, I want to stop waiting. That's when I notice my horse; she's in a tent, the tent is stripped in all different colors, lemon, candy apple red, citrus orange, blueberry, raspberry, blackberry, kiwi! Normally I like the colors but in this dream they are too vibrant, they remind me of acid, a bad trip. I look at the pulsating tent and I know my horse is in there. I can't see her, I just know.

There's a giant Dijon honey mustard yellow slide only its brighter like a bottle of hotdog mustard. It's repulsive, I can smell it, I want to gag I want to be away from it. I can't see the germs but have this feeling that it's infested in them. Rachel and I quickly walk by it. I don't hesitate to throw back the curtain of the tent. I see my horse and a man in a long white coat. My phone goes off, it's Mason. He's angry with me, the text doesn't say so but I know he is, he's asked me to go to his game. For some reason I have plans, I don't know what they are but I know I have them. I have to get rid of the plans so I can go to his game, his hockey game. But I can't cancel the plans I just can't and I don't even know what they are but I can't cancel them. I look at Rachel and I don't have to speak, no one speaks in my entire dream except the doctor in the white coat standing next to my horse. Rachel already knows, I don't how but I know she just knows. She throws her head back and laughs. She's obsessed with my love triangle, me, my boyfriend Joe, Mason. I know she thinks I'm crazy for wanting to go to the game but I know she'll go. She knows she'll go too. She's that type of best friend. If I went anywhere she'd follow. If she'd go anywhere I'd follow. If I went to a bridge and decided I was going to jump off, she'd follow me to the bridge, then she'd go rent a boat and pick me up. I make her life more interesting and she keeps me sane. She keeps me in existence, if there were no her there'd be no me, there'd be no dream. I am whatever she wishes me to be and she is the same. I need her. I must, she's in the dream. We love each other in that way.

Suddenly the room becomes still. I forget about my plans, I forget about Mason and I hear an echo, someone is screaming below water. But there's no water. It's the man in the white coat, the doctor, he's talking to me, his expression is suspicious. I don't like him, he's Indian, I don't know

why but I know I don't like him. He keeps talking; his words seem sly it's the way he says them, except I can't hear them they still sound under water. Holy tits. His words ripple, they are under an invisible layer of water, I can watch them echo, strange to not hear words but to see them, there are no letters just sound, movement of sound. The words are bad, I know they are. My stomach drops, Rachel is gone. Why is she gone? I want her back, but I don't know where to find her. She's evaporated; poof, thin air.

It's me and the doctor and my horse in the tent. Then I see him, the wolf. He's grey, dark charcoal grey, he's prowling, I can see his legs near the exam table. He wants my horse. He can't have her, I won't let him. I grab the reins on my horse and force her out. She doesn't want to go, I have to tell her she needs to but I don't know how. I place her face in my hand and bring it to mine, our foreheads touch, they exchange information; she knows, now she knows she has to come. We leave the tent and people are running frantically in all directions. I don't know which way to go I want to jump on my horse and have her run but I don't. I'm scared to ride her. What if he gets her because I slow her down? The wolf! He's on top of a trailer he's looking at us, he wants my horse. I look at her; she's beautiful, she's auburn brown and the hair on her mane is black. I don't have to speak she knows what I'm thinking. I pat her back and nod my head in the direction I want her to go. She takes off and I remain where I am. The wolf looks at me now, he's excited, this is a game to him. He's no longer interested in my horse he wants me. And for some reason I want him. I want him to come, I want him to catch me. He'll bite me. Rip my skin open and nibble on the pieces. But I don't care. My phone goes off again, it's Mason, his game is starting, I should be there I need to be there. But I have plans. Plans I don't know of but I know I have them and I have the wolf. And the plans. And the wolf is coming. And my phone is going off. And I can see the ice rink and the wolf is closer and—

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, and I'm awake. I'm in a room, my boyfriend's room, Joey's room. He's sound asleep. I grab my phone, no text's. Mason was only in the dream. I shut my eyes but I am awake now. I'm curious now. It's been a month already maybe two since the last time we talked. I wonder if he's forgiven me yet. I wonder if he would respond if I texted him? I don't have it in me to try. I wonder when his next game is. Maybe I'll go? What if Joe found out? He won't. I'll go and I'll lean against the glass and I'll watch and maybe he'll see me and maybe he won't. But if he does, he'll know, he'll know I was there, that I'll always be there. I want to go back into my dream and let the wolf have me. I want to go away to the quiet dark corner of my mind that only I know about and stay there forever. The place where the wolf is waiting. The place where I can have a love triangle and it all be okay. The place that lies between me and awake.

Fort De Soto

Jennie Weer

I remember when we were away together.
The ocean lays like a big blue blanket in front of us.
The actual ocean and not a lake, or pond or creek.
White sand filters through my toes;
not brown or gray like I'm used to.
White. Clean, magical white.
Shells are hiding in the grains.
Men bare their hairy chests and look at boats they wish to have.
Women lie in bikinis, hoping for a tan.
Children play with buckets to make castles.
Devil rays sway near the shore.
Dolphins leap in the distance,
And baby sharks swim in groups past us.
He's there, too. He's the one that brought me.
We apply sunscreen to each other's backs.
There are dozens of people on that beach,
But he's the only one that matters.
There I was, sneaking and sharing a Bud Lite with him,
Fending off the seagulls that wanted my peanut butter sandwich,
Blocking out the distractions that happen back home.
Now I sit, remembering, wishing I could go back.



Ashley Brinkman, *Batman Still Life*, charcoal

Masks and Capes

Joseph Cain

The wound was a lot less serious than it felt. Granted, the pain it sent ripping through Bram's leg could be likened to a white hot knife carving a blood filled rift down his calf, but it wasn't anything that couldn't be easily fixed. Thankfully the bullet had only grazed him as he leapt one of the dozen or so waist high walls that dotted the old construction site, their stone covered by years of gravelly dust and dirt packed down by the weight of heavy machinery. There wasn't any shrapnel to sift for in his flesh.

Less thankfully, the walls were slowly starting to disappear as he made his way towards the site's southern end. He was limping badly, blood was dripping steadily out behind him, marking his path like a grizzly scarlet trail of breadcrumbs, and he was running out of cover fast.

Bram took a shuddering breath as he cleared another wall, bullets whizzing past his ears. His pulse was a thundering hammer in his chest. For a few seconds he allowed himself a reprieve from the heated chase, crouching low behind nearest wall the wall, wincing as pain tore upward from the red gash on his leg. Sweat soaked the slick black mask that covered the upper portion of his face. The cape hung like a shadow on his shoulders. A shadow ripped by gunshots and the lunging of knives.

Honestly, Bram couldn't believe he'd gotten himself into this big a mess. Again, at least. During his earliest trips downtown it was more than common for him to end up cornered like a rat by a pack of street toughs brandishing pistols and crude bludgeoning weapons such as baseball bats and bent golf drivers.

But he'd been a shrimp back then. Ten years old with nothing to defend himself but a katana two feet too big for him and a bulletproof vest so bulky he could hardly move. The same katana now hung comfortably along his back, kept secure by a Velcro strap sewn into the back of the baggy blue tunic that covered his protective vest.

The towering skyscrapers that made up the majority of downtown Gruin city's hulking mass cast oblong shadows across Bram's surroundings, yellowish moonlight illuminating his pursuers. "Damndamndamn" Bram cursed, tongue dry and lips chapped. He'd run out of construction site and was stuck between the wall and a chain link fence that marked the southern border. He could climb it of course. But that would require exposing himself completely, and as good as his armor was it wouldn't hold out long enough to get over the top.

If only his mother could see him now. She'd spent his entire life warning him against this exact situation, spent years training him, yet in a fashion typical of him he'd gone and done

something stupid, tripped an alarm or two and ended up here. Probably about to die.

The only way she'd be any angrier were if he survived by teaming up with a Cape who happened to be flying by amongst the skyscrapers.

Thoughts racing, he peered around the wall to assess his opponents.

A half dozen in all, the haphazard collection of miscreants wielded nine millimeters in various degrees of disrepair. One had a piece of duct tape wrapped around the base of the handle to keep the clip from falling out. Another had a large chip on the muzzle. Gloved fingers held firm on the triggers. They wouldn't hesitate if they had an open shot.

However, it wasn't the guns Bram was worried about. Guns he could deal with. Guns were easy, predictable, almost. Bullet's projector could be predicted to some degree when you took ricochet and the skill of the firer into account.

No. What Bram was worried about were the chrome steel bracelets fastened tightly around each of the thug's right wrists.

The size of old timey shackles, the bracelets' chrome surfaces twinkled in the moonlight. A series of three blinking lights occupied the narrow control panels, all set on an ominous burgundy. Along the bracelets' top was a raised notch that extended two inches out over the wearers hand. Like the barrel of a gun.

While at first glance the wrist wear looked like cheap novelty toys handed out in children's goody bags, they were anything but. Instead of plastic these were made of a titanium alloy. Nonmagnetic and so resistant to heat that it would take either a volcano or the surface of the sun to melt it down completely. Whichever was more readily at hand.

As evidenced by the smoldering patch of sulfur that used to be a lock of Bram's hair, these little accessories packed quite the punch. A punch more than capable of reducing the young vigilante to a steaming blob of blood, semi-solid bones and major organs.

Wouldn't that be just lovely?

Experimentally Bram grasped the hilt of his sword, grazing a finger over the small black button set an inch below the guard. He could feel the blade positively shiver in its sheathe. It wanted to come out desperately. To feast in flesh and battle and death.

His sword had a rather vindictive personality.

Suddenly a red pulse of energy sizzled through the air and took a large chunk out of the walls top. Left in its wake was a hole that looked to have been carved with an oversized lightsaber.

"We gotcha now Masky boy!" one of the pursuers called out. "Come out and maybe I won't shove

that little toy sword up your ass!” Chuckles passed among the thugs. Well, Bram thought. At least someone’s having a good time tonight.

Crouching lower against the wall he drew his sword with an audible hiss. A bead of yellow light shimmered down the blade’s sharpened edge. Energy itching to be released.

Bram had two options, neither of which were very appealing. Either he leapt out now and engaged his attackers head to head, letting his sword do its work, or carve his way through the fence and out of the site, leaving himself fully exposed as he ran at half speed down the empty street, hindered by his injured leg.

The sword shuddered in his hand. That was its way of voicing an opinion. Vibrating, shaking, and sometimes releasing a single spark of charge inside its casing. Bram rolled his eyes.

“I know what you want” he said aloud. “Course you wanna fight. You’re not gonna melt if you get hit.” Again the hilt shuddered. “Fuck you” Bram said, eyes closing briefly. There wasn’t much of a choice, though. Either die fighting or die limping away from the battlefield.

The first one.

Yeah, he could live with that.

With an expertly executed roll that sent daggers down his calf, the vigilante took refuge behind another wall a few yards closer to his targets. He’d have to be closer if this was going to work. Then again it probably wasn’t going to work. It was a really crazy idea. But then again, again, this whole line of work was dangerous and crazy.

Taking a final breath of preparation, Bram readied his sword and spun outward on his good leg. Years of training had hardened the adolescent’s mind into a sharp tool of battle. Each individual element of the battlefield hung in his field of vision like pieces spread out on a chessboard. Each of his enemies’ movements seemed to slow down to a snail’s pace.

They were deliberate, easy to predict, and those natural predictions gave Bram everything he needed to form a plan mid spin. The first red burst came from the thug on the right. Beads of adrenaline-induced sweat dribbled down his pale brow, the gun in his other hand shaking as the tiniest whiffs of smoke seeped from the firing bracelet.

With a single fluid motion Bram brought his sword up to meet the bolt of energy. The bolt met the katana’s flat edge, and, sending electrifying vibrations across the metal, the bolt ricocheted off to the side, fizzling out in the air after traveling uninhibited for more than thirty yards. Coming to the end of his spin Bram stomped his feet down firmly, planting his stance.

“Come on then. Show me what you’ve got.” he called.

Dumbfounded, the thugs stared at their young prey holding the sword before him at the ready, wearing a mask and swaths of purple and crimson that stood out against the dark hue of his cape.

Few, if any, of them had ever encountered a Mask before. They'd heard stories of course, whispered in hushed, awed tones in the city's many bars, dives and run down hang outs that speckled the streets. They were the shadowy figures of myth that passed from mouth to ear, invisible forces that shattered bones, bodies, and crime organizations in their wake.

Some said Masks were even more dangerous than their Cape counterparts. Capes were the ones who soared high above the streets, bodies empowered beyond the dreams of mortal, smiling superficially in the advertisements and political ads that swarmed the media nonstop. They were gods among men. Yet Masks were the ones criminals feared beyond all others.

Some of them at least.

The good ones.

The bad ones were weeded out quickly. Killed off by a combination of bullets and their own incompetence.

But those who survived were forces of nature. Unstoppable. The stuff of nightmares.

Now the thugs chasing Bram had nightmares chasing their once adrenaline thrilled thoughts away as they realized just who it was they'd cornered.

Out in the open, the boy's chest was illuminated by a thin finger of moonlight slanting in through the scaffolding and girders rising around him. A jade black S twinkled on the multicolored tunic.

Up until now they hadn't known who they'd been chasing. He was just a nameless vigilante trying to foil their operations. Nothing to worry about. Not with the hardware they were sporting. But what they couldn't have counted on was going toe to toe with one half of the most notorious Mask duo of all. The Maiden, a mysterious armored woman hardly ever seen or heard but whose influence was always noticed, and the Squire, her boy companion.

Yes, they'd cornered the Squire. Now that they saw who he was, it was a completely different fight. A few of the thugs exchanged glances. Two dropped their guns and ran right then and there. "Pussies." the one closest to Bram snarled. "It's just one stupid kid with a toy sword. Guess you're not so tough without mommy 'round, are ya?" he asked mockingly.

The Squire's blade swung down so fast that the movement barely registered. A searing hot arc of barely visible blue burst from the sword's edge. The mocking thug felt his bracelet fall to the

ground in two distinct halves. Wires hissed with electricity where they cut. Orange fluid leaked onto the gravel-strewn ground, melting the rocks into bubbling mush.

The thug blinked. Suddenly he was drenched in cold sweat. That could have easily been his arm. Another inch to the left, and his limb would've been severed at the shoulder. Two more inches, and it'd have cut him down the neck. Cleaved him in two.

"You were saying?" Bram called back. The thugs flinched. His voice was deeper than expected. Nothing about him was as they'd expected. Not that they'd expected him in the first place. "Come on then. Either run off like your friends or get on it with it. Either's fine with me." A challenge.

Well, that could be interpreted either as the oversized ego of a teenage boy or the boasting of a genuinely skilled combatant. Either way, the thugs took the bait and charged, inspired by fear, the desire to take down a legend, and just a wee bit of stupidity.

Stupidity, mostly.

Bram smiled as they sprinted forward. His sword rose.

Just another night on the town.

The Other Me

Gloria Leonard

"Your personality," you say.
It's what you like about me,
But honestly, I don't think you know
What that really is.
My sunny disposition,
Contagious laughter,
And sunshine smile?
You can't like me for my personality
Because you don't know all of me.
Like how I cry in my room at night,
After a day of holding myself together
While I've secretly been falling apart.
How I stare at an empty glass,
Wishing for it to be at least half empty.
Or how every piece of me breaks
Because I'm too much
Or not enough.
And the way I have to convince myself
The recommended dosage is all I need.
See? This isn't the me you like.
This isn't the girl you know.
You can't like me for my personality
Because I don't let my true self show.

Kaleidoscope

Tabitha Blaisdell

The world is like a kaleidoscope.
It's perceived differently through the eyes of a child.
The intricate colors and designs are meaningless to an adult,
while children become fascinated by this complexity.

We were all children once,
who looked at the world through rose colored lenses.
A mystical place full of many questions.
A time when curiosity surged through us,
And we had a thirst for knowledge.

Eventually, our childlike zest for life changes.
It's the heartbreaking moment when you wake up on Christmas morning,
And you're no longer a child. The magic ceases to exist.
We're forced to ignore all the possibilities and "what ifs."
Influenced by our parents and peers, we begin to look at life logically.
Our curiosity no longer praised, but inhibited.

A Lover's Perfume

Matt Hess

The leaves fall

 To the ground

 Like a blanket of gold

The wind spins them

 Mixing up colors

 Like an artist preparing

 For a watercolor

The trees stand tall

 Harsh brown in stark contrast

 With the gentle, soft blue

The smell of autumn

 Like the perfume of a lover

 Beckons me from the warmth

 Of my tea and armchair

To come out and play

Hot Chocolate

Katie Davisson

Hot chocolate to warm my hands
At a football game
We are down by a field goal
And there are seven minutes on the clock

My adrenaline is pumping
Everything is on fire
Everything but my hands
And my nose
And my cheeks

It's so cold outside
I ask dad for fifty cents
Even he struggles to pull out the coins

I rush to the concession stand
"One hot chocolate please"
They hand it over
The cup is so warm
I don't even drink the golden liquid inside

Instead I make my way back to the bleachers
Sit down next to my dad
Hold the hot cocoa in my hands
And cheer as we make the winning touch down

Clark Kent

Nicole Thomsen

When I was seven I had this grand idea that my father was superman. I guess when you're seven and your dad flips over a car in front of you it's really a rather studious assumption. That wasn't the only reason I was convinced my dad was a superhero though, he used to wear a red t-shirt under his work cloths and so in my head I took that as his criminal-kicking-butt-saving-lives suit of armor. He always had to work nights and to me bad things only happened at night so that was only another contributing factor. What really had me convinced all happened in one night.

My dad had just left for work and I was supposed to be in bed but instead I was spying on my mom who was really just watching the news. She gasped at something on the screen and she started to tear up so I did what any seven year old would do when their mom starts crying. I cried too. I remember running down the stairs and grabbing at her leg, she was standing; I must have freaked her out because the look she gave me wasn't like that in which you give to normal children.

My mom then told me she was crying because an orphanage two blocks down from where she grew up had caught on fire. All the children that lived there were trapped inside the building and there was no safe way to get them out. She put her hand on my shoulder thinking it would cheer me up, but the truth is it made me feel worse. I had a mother, one who really loved me. I was in a house, safe and sound. Those children in the orphanage were not only abandoned and without mothers, they were about to be nothing more than ashes. Suddenly the woman reporting on the television began talking really fast. I didn't see it but seemingly some man had run through the barricade and into the building. Then he appeared again only this time with a child in his arms. He ran back into the building and one by one took all of the children out. I probably didn't pick up on it until his third trip in, but he had on a red shirt. LIGHTBULB! That was all I needed to know to make the assumption that my father, James Robert Thomsen Sr. was superman. All these thoughts were running through my head. Was I the only one who knew? Does my mom know? Is this really happening? Does this make me super princess or something? My mom gasped again and I looked back up at the screen, the building had collapsed, hero still inside. Me? I thought my dead was dead needless to say, I fainted.

When I awoke, my mother was standing over me. She had a cool wash cloth on my forehead and a bag of ice on my chin, apparently it broke my fall. I then remembered why I had fainted in the first place and began wailing. The door to my room opened and I was almost positive it was going to be my younger brother who walked through when to my surprise it was my father. He was alive, covered in at what I thought at the time to be ashes but really turned out to be cement powder. For me that was the final piece to the puzzle. Super strength to flip the car, courage to save the kids,

super speed to make it out of the building; there was only one conclusion, my dad was superman.

Sometime after the event, I had been on the playground at recess when this girl, Ashley, who for the moment was my friend, decided she was going to inform me that superheroes weren't real. When I told her she was wrong, she not only stuck out her tongue at me but she highly insulted my intelligence by calling me stupid. I gave her the benefit of the doubt and told her again that indeed they were real and in fact I knew one. She then laughed in my face and stuck her tongue out at me only this time leaving it out. I punched her in the mouth.

When my father came to pick me up from school, he honestly wasn't mad he just wanted to know why I had struck a fellow student. I figured it was time to tell him the truth. I looked him dead in the eye and said, "Dad. I know." He gave me a puzzled look so I not only repeated myself but I winked too.

I didn't find out until years later, that my dad's work shirts that year were red, or that he flipped the car because he was a body builder and he had an adrenalin rush. He came home from work early the night that I fainted because my mom called him and the man from the building really did die. So my dad might not be Clark Kent after all. But he is James Robert Thomsen Sr., and he did teach me how to throw one hell of a right hook. Just ask Ashley, she would know.

Polite

Patrick McElwain

When did politeness become flirtation?
This is often due to misinterpretation.
A slight nod, a brief smile, even a quick wave;
The simplest of polite gestures
Does not translate into a sexual advance.
There's always been a difference between a greeting and a groping.
Not according to you, though,
So you refuse to acknowledge me.
You have no idea how much I'd love to
Say something like "Don't flatter yourself, honey"
Or even just scoff at you from behind.
But I don't.
I bite my tongue and keep walking.
After all, complaining to you would be impolite.

Praying In Serenity

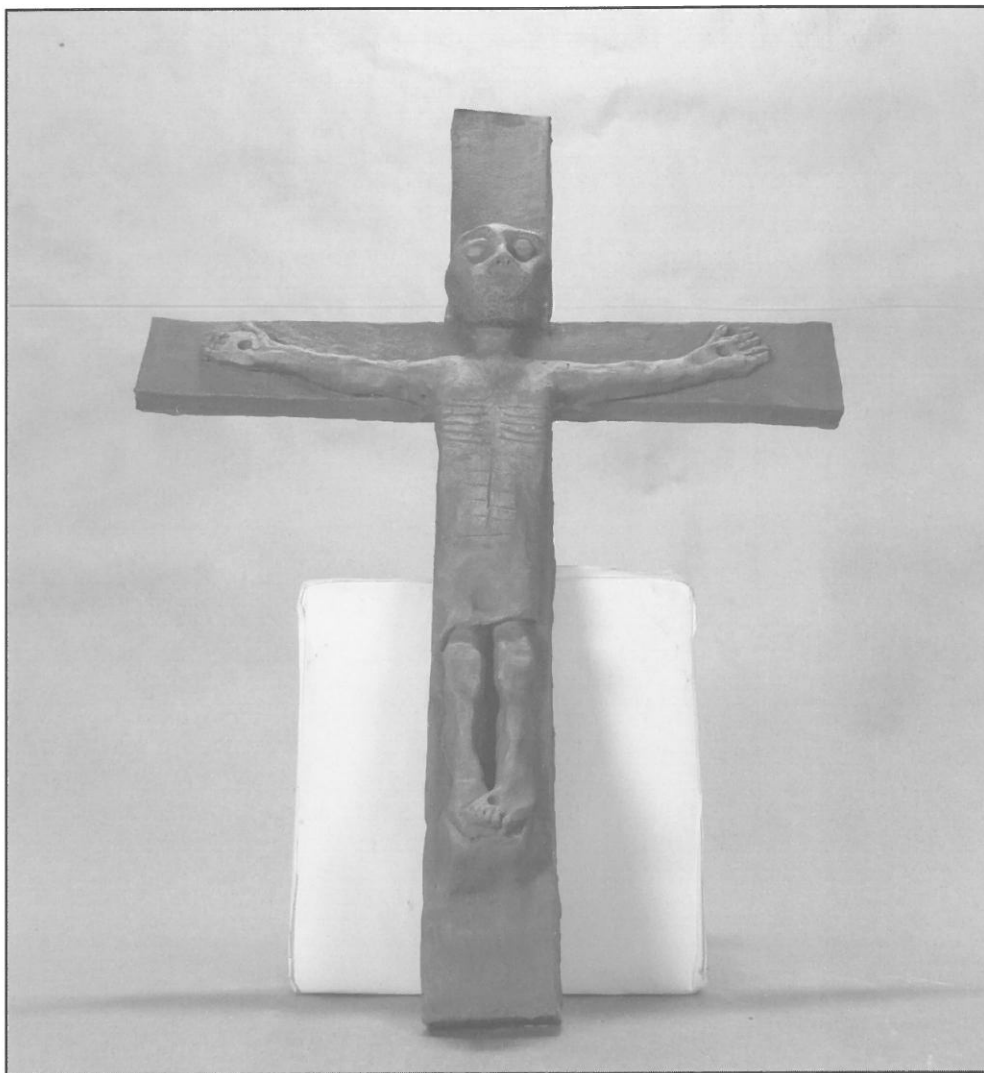
Jennie Weer

Like a child clutches his mother's hand,
He holds his rosary
And marks the beads with his fingers.
He studies the crucifix
And recites the "Our Father."
Works of kindness
Take over his days.
Striving to be a better person,
Anxious to help others.
A weekly routine
An ordinary system
Counting beads
Praying.

Flying High

Tanner Brunson

Veins popping
with bruises and scratches
consequences of good times
The arm arcs and the wrist follows
The disc falls by the wayside
The fingers should lead, not resolve
the arm controls the direction
the wrist controls the powers



J.D. Gutterman, *Crucifixion*, stoneware clay

My Mother's Wedding Dress

Victoria Berenda

Occasionally, I go into my mother's closet to borrow a scarf or a piece of jewelry, and every time I do, my eyes are drawn to her wedding dress. The dress hangs in the very back of her closet, behind the "someday these will fit again" clothing, and is covered by the black drycleaner-like bag that the bridal store gave her twenty years ago.

I've only seen the dress out of the bag once. It is the typical late 80's, early 90's style with poofy sleeves, a high neckline, and beading on the bodice. Although I think it looks gaudy and ridiculous, I've often heard the story about how the dress cost far more than Mimi, my grandmother, had budgeted, but my mom looked so beautiful in it that Mimi made the purchase anyway. When I was eighteen, my mom startled me by asking if I wanted the dress.

"I thought you might want it as a keepsake or maybe to make into your own wedding dress," she said.

"Why? So I can curse my own marriage? That dress is like a bad omen, and I don't know why you still have it," I replied.

When I was fourteen, I found the video of my parents' wedding at my grandma's house, so I popped it in the VCR. After pushing play, the church we attended until I was six years old filled the screen, and at least a hundred people, some of whom I recognized as younger versions of aunts, uncles, grandparents, and close family friends, were looking for their seats while exchanging hugs and hellos. Pale pink and white flowers hung at the end of each pew and were in vases near the pulpit, giving the old sanctuary an elegant feel. After most of the guests had found their seats, the minister nodded at the organist, and the wedding procession began. My dad and his groomsmen took their places at the altar, and the bridesmaids, who held bouquets and wore pink, poofy dresses, began to walk down the aisle. In the corner of the screen, my mom, with her veil covering her face, stood with Papa, my grandfather. Mom adjusted the train of her dress and looped her arm in her father's.

Then, she walked down the aisle in her poofy, white dress with big, permed hair while Dad waited for her at the altar. Mom and Papa reached the front of the church, and Papa gave Dad Mom's hand.

As the minister welcomed the guests and my parents began to exchange their vows, I examined the sanctuary. All of the anticipated wedding elements: flowers, a wedding party, friends, and family were there; however, as my parents said their vows, I realized that the love and passion a wedding is supposed to encompass was missing.

I studied my parents and noticed that Mom wouldn't make eye contact with Dad. She was

staring at the ground, and although she was holding her bouquet, she kept wringing her hands and popping her knuckles, something she does when she is nervous. In the meantime, Dad glared down at Mom with his jaw clenched. When the minister said it was time for the rings, Mom glanced over her shoulder, with an almost earnest look on her face, toward Mimi, and Dad rubbed the back of his neck with his hand, which I knew meant that he needed a drink.

I looked at the guests, but nobody, including both of my grandmothers, shed a tear. The guests wore unresponsive facial expressions, and some crossed their arms as my parents said their vows in dry, indifferent voices, kissed one another, and were introduced as Mr. and Mrs. David Campbell.

“He told me he was going to leave me if I didn’t marry him,” Mom told me as she looked at the floor and wrung her hands. “I was young and stupid, and I’m still sorry.”

I took her hand.

Now, the wedding dress hangs in the back of my mother’s closet, and when I see it, I remember the yelling that went on in our household; I remember how hard my mom had to work to regain her confidence after years of insults and criticisms; and I’m forced to remember my father, a man I have become indifferent toward. The wedding dress in the back of my mother’s closet is simply a reminder of what was and what never should have been.

Control

Kristina Hemmerling

And with each step I sink lower,
go deeper into the ground.
With a few more steps my eyes will be even with the tile.
A few after that, I'll be invisible, below ground.
Not worthy of being seen.
But I can't stop it.
I have to take that next step,
have to go deeper.
Because if I'm honest with myself,
this is what I want.
To feel the pressure rising, the constricting of my throat.
To know what's coming next,
for one measly moment.
I know it's wrong and bad and painful,
but if I get to control it,
then I can deal with all of those things.

I

Thomas Day

A Cheshire grin often lights
this face of mine,
outwardly bold, but full of frights.
Never shows, but in the dead of nights
is never fine.

You Can't Kill a Hanster

Randee Portteus

I was working part time at McKinley Creek Pet Shop during college so that I had money for booze on the weekends. It was a dingy shop set between a run down Kroger where teenagers hung out and smoked cigarettes and a hairdresser that was possibly a drug dealer. I rode my bike there from my dorm room and locked it up out back, where my boss, Ricky, was constantly smoking weed.

"Hey, bro." He blew smoke in my face as I walked in the back door.

"Hey, Ricky." I replied, entering the storage room. Ricky was an asshole, but he was harmless and he let me and Carl, my coworker, do whatever we wanted as long as we didn't tell on him. Carl was bent in half, his head resting on the counter, when I came in. I grinned.

"Good morning, sunshine." I said too loudly. Carl jerked upright.

"Huh?" The boy could sleep anywhere, anytime, no matter what was going on. And on a dead Saturday morning at McKinley's, it was easy. "I'm here now, let's get to work." I barked.

"Why?" He groaned, rubbing his face and stepping out from behind the counter.

"The sooner we do our busy work, the sooner we can play." I nodded at the TV behind the counter. We hooked up my old PlayStation to it and played games that were popular during our childhood. Spiro. Crash Bandicoot. Tekken.

"Fine." Carl grabbed the broom and started sweeping. I began feeding the animals. We had mostly small animals, but there were two cats that were sort of up for adoption, mostly just owned by the store. Their names were Spiro and Crash. Go figure. As usual, I fed them and left their cages open so they could explore the shop. Spiro wound around my legs and I reached down to pet him. Crash made a beeline out of his cage and ran into the puppy cage before taking off again. He was a bit of a spaz.

We usually had a few puppies, but they went quickly. We never had kittens, only Spiro and Crash. The owner of the store was an elderly woman named Julia Gates who opened the shop with her husband thirty years ago. Our inventory was based mostly on her whims, and when Ricky could sober up and convince her this or that would bring in more business.

We also had birds, mice, rats, hamsters, turtles, and fish. Unlike other pet stores, our animals were mostly healthy. Because Carl and I, or really me forcing Carl, cared about them. I took out the dead fish and flushed them every morning, cleaned the tanks and cages, and did my best to give everyone attention. Except the hamsters. I hated hamsters.

Everyone thought they were so cute and harmless and wonderful.

I thought they were the spawn of Satan, and I was proved right one particular Saturday. The bell attached to the front door rang as our first customer came in. He was a harried looking man with a sad comb over that I'd seen in the shop before. "Good morning!" I said, "Can I help you?"

He thrust a box towards me. "I can't take care of this thing, but I can't kill it either."

I stared at the box, then looked back up at the man. "Excuse me?"

He sighed. "I breed hamsters, but I think this thing might be the devil. I still can't kill him though."

"Okay." I was confused, but I reached for the box and began opening it.

"Don't open it!" The man's voice cracked.

"Okay, okay. Sorry."

He relaxed. "It's okay. Good luck." He turned and walked out of the store.

"Well that was frickin weird." Carl was behind me.

"Yeah." I agreed. I set the box on the counter and continued my rounds, feeding the devil-spawn, then the rats (who I let run up my arms and perch on my shoulder), the turtles, and the rest. I just finished when I heard the hissing. I spotted Spiro perched on a shelf watching the fish. Crash. I headed to the front just in time to hear Carl shout, "Holy shit!" I ran. Crash was backed into a corner by a monstrous albino hamster. It was at least twice the size of a normal hamster and its one eye was bright red. The other was missing.

I reached out to grab the thing but it clamped its sharp little teeth into my hand. I shrieked and shook my hand but it held on. Crash shot by me as I screamed, "Get the gloves, the gloves! Carl!" He dropped his broom and sprinted towards the back. He returned wearing thick gloves and carefully extricated the hamster from my hand. "What is this thing?" He shouted as it twisted in his hands.

"I don't know!" I was panicking. "Is there an empty cage somewhere?"

"There's an empty turtle cage, we'll fix it later!" The hamster was twisting and ... growling in Carl's hands.

"Is it growling?" I was terrified.

"Yes, now go take the lid off the cage!" Carl yelled back at me.

We got the thing in the cage and stood staring at it.

"Holy mother of God." I said.

"El Diablo." Carl whispered.

I burst out laughing and slapped him on the back. "Good name, Carl."

"Thanks, Jeana. Now let's make sure this thing doesn't get out."

We settled for putting one of the heavier books on top of the cage and called it good. I found Crash and made sure he was unharmed. I gave him a treat and set him next to Spiro to watch the fish. Then I headed behind the counter to play Tekken with Carl.

We had Diablo for a week before one of the hamster-whisperers came in. He was a breeder who sometimes sold hamsters to us and he absolutely adored the evil things. One look at Diablo and he was in love. "Hey Jeana!" He called, "Is this beauty for sale?" I went over to where Mr. Hamster Lover was standing in front of Diablo.

"Yeah, but he's the devil."

The man laughed. "You say that about all hamsters, girl."

"No, really. He attacks us when we feed him. He terrorized one of our cats."

Even though I was completely serious, the man smiled condescendingly. "He's probably just stressed from being here. I'll take him."

"Carl!" I called. Diablo hated him less than he hated me, so I usually made Carl handle him.

We got him in a box, the man chuckling as Diablo twisted, bit, and hissed. I was not sorry to see the man walk out the door. "Thank God." Carl said. I wordlessly raised my hand for a high-five, and Carl smacked it.

Our triumph lasted for barely twenty-four hours. The man returned the next day, red in the face. "It killed my Mama." He said, slamming the box on the counter. I heard Diablo hiss.

"What?" I mean, Diablo was evil, but I didn't really think he could kill a human.

"My Mama hamster. My most fertile hamster. He killed her."

Struggling not laugh, I told him we'd give him a full refund. It wasn't like we hadn't warned him. Diablo went back in the cage, and two books went on top of it this time. Now that he tasted hamster blood I was bit worried he'd go Cujo on us.

Another week of hell went by and Carl and I began to wonder if we should just kill the thing. But then, Hippie Henrietta came in. Henrietta was a regular. She was usually going on and on about aura's and animals' power to calm the human spirit and blah, blah, blah. Carl and I enjoyed imitating her after she left.

And of course Henrietta fell for Diablo worse than the Hamster Man did. She went on and on about his injured spirit and how she wanted to heal him and give him a home of peace and love.

"Henrietta." I said, interrupting her spiel.

"Yes, dear?" She said, looking me dead in the eye. She had an uncomfortable habit of doing this for long periods of time.

"This thing is evil."

"Nonsense, darling, he is only injured!"

I exchanged a glance with Carl, who shrugged, boxed up Diablo with more success than the last time, and waved good riddance as Henrietta left. "How long do you think it'll last?" I asked.

"I give it three days." We watched Henrietta put Diablo in her bicycle basket and pedal off.

"Two." I said.

"Winner buys the other a drink?"

"Deal."

Two days later, Carl owed me a drink. Henrietta came back in with a shoebox duct-taped shut. Her hands were covered in scratches and bite marks. Some of them were bleeding.

"I cannot heal him. The wounds in his spirit are too deep." Henrietta looked crushed.

"Don't worry Henrietta. He's just evil." Carl said.

She sighed, inconsolable.

"Here, Henrietta." I walked out from behind the counter and gestured to the rats. "This little guy is getting antsy. I think he might need some peace and healing." I pointed to a black and white rat who was scratching the side of the cage. He'd taken to doing that often. Henrietta bent down to look at him, and he stopped scratching to look at her.

"He's lovely!" She said, cheering up considerably.

"I definitely think he needs you." I said, matter of fact.

"Darling, you are right. You must have a gift!"

I didn't know about that, but I did know Henrietta was crazy. She was also kinder than anyone I'd ever met. Animals in pain made her sad. And for whatever reason she believed Diablo was in pain. I believed it was because he'd been released from hell and couldn't function normally on Earth.

Henrietta left with the friendly rat, and Diablo went back to his cage. Crash hissed and spat as I walked past with the box containing Diablo. "I know, I know." I told him. I hated the hamster too.

Again Carl and I debated killing the hamster, but we were spared by a big, bald man coming in. He stopped at the counter, looked around, and said, "I need something to feed my snake."

I glanced at Carl, then said, "What kind of snake?"

"A ball python."

"How big?"

"About three feet."

"We have just the thing."

The man laughed when we showed him Diablo and told him our stories. "Vica will take care of him, no problem." After the man left, Carl and I did a victory dance. This time, though, our celebration only lasted three hours. The man came back in just before closing.

"This little bastard attacked Vica." He said.

"No." I was speechless. What was wrong with this hamster?

"Yes."

We apologized, refunded the man, and gave him a few mice to take with him, on the house. After Diablo attacked his poor snake we figured we owed him. Carl looked at me, then said, "I think it's time, Jeana."

"I agree."

The way we put things down humanely at McKinley's was to put them in the freezer. That way, they simply went to sleep. No pain, just a nice, long nap. Diablo deserved a nice, long nap more than any animal I'd ever put in the freezer. We gave Diablo a short ceremony, saluted him, and closed the freezer door.

"Goodbye, Diablo." I said.

We put Diablo in freezer Friday night. On Monday morning, we remembered him. "I'll go get him out." Carl said.

"Okay." I was playing with Spiro on the floor.

A few minutes later, I heard Carl yell, "Holy fuck!"

I was on my feet and at the freezer in a heartbeat. Diablo's box lay on the floor with a hole in it and Diablo was attached to Carl's hand by the teeth. "Gahhh!" I yelled. I grabbed the gloves and jerked the hamster off Carl. "What is wrong with you?" I yelled at the hamster. Diablo hissed.

We put Diablo back in his now-empty cage and sat down to talk about it.

"We could burn it or cut its head off." Carl suggested. "Or both."

"No. We'll just put his box in a plastic bag and then put it in the freezer. Tomorrow."

"Okay."

When we got to work the next morning, Diablo wasn't in his cage. He wasn't anywhere. We combed through the whole store. The back room. Examined the animals for injuries. Asked Ricky if he'd seen him (of course, he had no idea what we were even talking about). But Diablo was gone.

All the other animals were alive and well, so he hadn't attacked anything or eaten anything. He was just gone.

Carl and I sent up a prayer that we'd never see El Diablo again, and started a round of Crash Bandicoot.

I still think Diablo is out there, breeding with sewer rats and creating a breed of highly evil ham-rats that may one day take over the world.

But for now, I'm not too worried about it. Besides, Carl still owed me that

Happiness

Kristina Hemmerling

Where does happiness come from?

Looking good,

Doing well,

Being successful,

Getting others to like you?

Why do we care

So much

About what others think?

We're social creatures that are interdependent

So I guess it's not

Ridiculous

To be worried of others' thoughts.

We let them affect us

Because we need them?

Because we're parts of a greater whole

But you should be able to find happiness

in yourself, too.

Pain

Jennie Weer

Like a picked flower, it slowly dies unseen.

Petals falling, Beauty withering,

Death is in the vase.

October 2, 2010

Megan Atwood

Salty tears crawl down his cheeks,
As he listens to the ambulance sirens fade into the distance.
Surges of blue, white, and red fill the night sky.
He doesn't say a word as he watches.
"Will I ever see Papa again?"
Hunter questions his mother.
She hopes he won't notice her eyes welling up with tears.
With a deep breath and a silent count to ten,
She smiles briefly, squeezes his hand, and replies;
"Your grandfather has always been with you, and I promise he always will be."
She wants to be strong for her son,
Though she finds it hard to explain the situation to a six year old.
Hunter had just seen his grandfather hours before,
So it didn't make sense as to why he was gone now.
She once again takes a deep breath,
Breathing in the cool autumn air.
Collecting herself, she decides it's time to leave.
She reaches for her son's hand,
Turning her back on a situation she never wanted to face.
The slivers of glass, tree branches, and busted mailbox;
Reminders of the evening's doings.
She can't help but remind herself,
The shattered ruins might always remain.

From A Picture

Victoria Berenda

A cigar and a martini.

That's all that is on my mind at the end of an 80 hour work week.

While most women my age spend Saturday nights out with girlfriends
or the guy they are sleeping with,

I shut my phone off for four hours

and sit on a barstool at McSorley's Old Ale House on 7th

I smoke my cigar,

drink multiple martinis,

and banter with the bar tender named George,

while wearing a tight bun and an "F-off" sign on my forehead.

"How many men do you think are brave enough to make a pass at you tonight?" George asks.

"I think I've built a reputation at this point," I tell him.

But sure enough,

a man with a greasy goatee and too much gel in his hair sits next to me.

He asks the cliché line,

"What is a beautiful young woman like you doing sitting at a bar alone?

Can I buy you a drink?"

George is already chuckling.

"No," I say without looking at the man.

I blow out a puff of smoke.

"Oh, I see. Hard to get," he says.

"No," I reply.

"Then, you have a boyfriend," he declares,

as if everything suddenly makes sense.

I eat the olive out of my martini.

"No boyfriend," I say.

Then, I give him the spiel.

"I work a lot. I don't have time for a relationship,

and I'm sure as hell not interested in you.

I just want to sit here, smoke, drink, and be left alone."

George is losing it.

“Well then, have a nice night,” the guy says and leaves.
George makes me another martini and asks,
“Can’t you cut one of them a break?”
“I don’t think so,” I say. “Besides, what else would you have to laugh about?”

Writing For Someone Else

Kristina Hemmerling

It’s interesting.
I want to write something
Meaningful.
I want to mean
Something.
But when I think of it,
it has to be to
Someone else.
I don’t seem to mean much
to myself-
Most of the time.
I just want
Someone
to read
Something
I’ve written and fall in love with it.
Because no matter how much I like it
It doesn’t mean much unless
Someone else
Likes it, too.

Charlie

Nicole Thomsen

I was laughing in bed with my best friend Mase. He had his shirt off and I was staring at his abs. He had hockey abs, the kind of abs that begin just under the pectorals and don't stop until the toes. They're wonderful. I've never really seen them for more than a second but tonight was different. Tonight was the first time I'd been in his room, well in his house really. Tonight is the first time I've been single in four years.

I don't know why but I really seem to like belly buttons. They are weird and sometimes gross and just too strange not to play with. My ex never let me play with his. He said it made him feel odd and that he didn't like it and even when I would joke about poking it he would get mad. Now that I think about it I can't really remember what his belly button looked like.

Mase on the other hand has a very peculiar belly button. He calls it an "on-tey" because it's an in-ey and an out-ey. It's strange, I like it. He begins to laugh, we've been laughing all night. It's funny how different it is to actually laugh again. I have my shirt on but his is still off. I didn't take it off, he did. He said he was "hot". Bullshit, he just wants to show off.

Every time he laughs they flex a little more. I sit up so I can watch them from a different angle. I lift my hand and gently place it on his chest. I work my way down each ab and stop at his belly button. He looks at me and gives his famous what-are-you-up-to smile. I just beamed back.

"I like it." I tell him.

"My abs?" he replied with a smirk. I shook my head from side to side.

"No." I laugh as I say it and I point to his belly button. He bursts out laughing and I decide that's the okay to play with it. I twirl my fingers in the tiny dug out and I like it even more. It's soft but hard like a little flesh marble. We kept talking and I kept playing when suddenly I noticed I was still chewing on the same piece of Stride Sweet Peppermint gum that I had put in my mouth this morning. I don't want the gum anymore.

Mase knows I've made a decision of some sort, he can tell. It's the type of relationship we have. He looks at me waiting for me to tell him but after four years of this he should have seen it coming.

"Can I have your hand please?" He looks at me like he always does before I'm about to spit my gum into it but then I change my mind. I see his hand and I don't want my gum to be there I want to my hand to be there. I decide to hold his hand and I do, but now I'm looking for a place to put my gum. I think about just how big the piece is and just how small his belly button is and I just know they are a perfect match.

I drop his hand and I can feel him watching me. I take my gum out of my mouth and roll it into a perfect ball. I stare at the ball to make sure it's totally even and then with one swift motion I jam it into his navel. He smiles at me and just accepts that I'm not normal.

"Thank you." He says and we're laughing again. I nod my head and grin back at him.

"I'm going to name him." I said with a childish smirk.

"Name who?" he said. I took my hand and pointed to his belly button like a child does when they can't pronounce the name of a meal to their waitress.

I knew it from the moment I saw it.

"Charlie."

Tiny Dancer

Corie Young

Back arched, arms locked, legs perfectly straight,
she twirls along the wooded floor.

Arms like wings as she soars through the air,
neck long and thin like the rest of her body.

Standing on pointed toes,
tip-toeing around her partner.

She tells the story with her movements,
finding a man and falling in love,
turning into a swan and back;
across a wooded forest, along a hidden lake.

Walk me through something like that.

Scarlette's Sailor

Connor Ring

It's been six years since I vowed to never sail,
Never again to hurt the ones I love;
Yet here you are,
Willing to overlook my sorrows,
Asking for the admiral I once was.
Do you not see me,
Broken like my only promise to her?
Oh, Scarlette, if only you were here for this.

I cannot go back to the sea,
Not after it kept me from my beloved.
Both my loves,
One being the sea,
By which I can always return;
And Scarlette,
Torn from me by the tides of fate.
How could I disgrace her by sailing with her murderer?
My Scarlette would still rest by my side,
Healthy and beautiful,
Instead of dressed in angelic robes.
I hate the sea,
And to return to it would drive me mad.

Training Wheel Tango

Nicole Thomsen

A bike, more like a trike. Training wheels. Sparkling pink ribbon. Even a woven basket resting on the handle bars. Purple grips. White tires. It was spectacular. I loved it. I'd ride it on my drive way, the lawn, the patio, Mr. Teri's lawn, the walk way. I wanted to take it everywhere. I begged my parents to go around the block with me or take me to the park. "One more lap, just one more," I'd tell them.

I liked to go fast. Slow wasn't bad, just fast was better. I swore the faster I pedaled the more my imagination ran. You see fast had a way of changing the bike, bringing it too life. Vegas. Short trip but a fond memory. The musicians! The vocalists! The lights! The show, what a show! The best part, the dancing girls. Their dresses, the way they'd catch the light. The training wheels would start humming. The tread gave a steady beat. As I sped up the two small wheels began to sing. They would go at it, try to see who was louder. The wind would pick up and the leaves would rustle, they'd jump out of their seats and storm the stage. A standing ovation! Then I'd slow down. I'd build the suspense. Slowly they'd begin to move.

The ribbons. The main act. They'd twirl to the sound of the tread. What we'd been waiting for. The dance. The Tango. Their dresses would catch the spot light. They'd change color. The pink would gleam out blues and golds. I was just getting ready for the grand finale when the sound of my mom's voice snapped me back to reality. My beautiful dancing girls fell flat, their act was dropped, they became just plain ribbons again.

I really did love that bike. After summer was out and we had to head back to school, I asked my mom if I could take it with me. She walked beside me as I rode. There was a long driveway that lead up to the school. I was at the end when I could just make out my friends on the black top. I raced into their circle. I wanted to know what could be so funny that every one of them was actually laughing.

Me. I was the joke. I had training wheels and pink ribbon. Suddenly my favorite gift wasn't so shiny. It wasn't so nice. It was painful and teary eyed. I gave it back to my mom. I never rode it again.

I Come From A Place

Thomas Day

I come from a place
where the street ends and the sidewalk begins.
Where you fall down and get up, not fall up.
Where there is a light in the bathroom, not one in the attic.
Where that shock of magic was just mere static.

From friends turned acquaintances turned faces in the street
whom you avoid talking to, you're tired, and you're beat.
No, not really, you have just fallen away
and don't want to discuss
the weather,
or baseball,
or whatever you must.

From taking all your savings,
and risking it all on one turn of pitch and toss,
to now starting a 401K
and hoping you'll
stay well enough to one day
spend it when your hair is gray
on golf in May
to your own dismay.

What happened to life and joy and childhood?
It never does much good
to ask anymore.

Dreamweaver

Mike Sosnowski

I fall asleep
And I dream
Of dragon's flight
And ships with sails
Worlds unreal
And stories untold
Shape shifting phantasms
And mind bending shadows
Prophecies revealed
And reality forsaken
This is the Dreamweaver's art
So arcane
And foreboding
It makes me plead
"Oh Dreamweaver
Please be kind
Hold me close
And guard my soul
See me through the night
And when I wake
I promise
I'll return
To your sweet escape

Veg Out

Randee Portteus

I always scorned vegetarians. Laughed at them. Thought they were stupid. Didn't even bother to understand them. Just ordered my steak and scarfed it down, while my mother praised me for cleaning my plate. Meat was the main component of my diet, as it is to most Americans. I adored steak. Pot Roast and Swiss steak with thick, juicy gravy were my favorites. KFC? I couldn't resist. Hamburgers, hotdogs, lunch meat, chicken nuggets, and, in particular, Campbell's Chunky Sirloin Burger Soup. Animals were stupid anyway. And this came from the girl who insisted on moving toads out of the road and worms back to the mud after it stopped raining.

The Student's Vegetarian Cookbook was handed to me about a month before I turned sixteen. "Here," my sister said, "I thought you might like this." I don't know what made me read it: the boredom of summer? Plain old curiosity? A chance to make more fun of vegetarians? And then I really started to read it. When I got to the part of the preface that talked about exactly how much meat the average human consumes in a lifetime, I almost vomited. I thought of putting myself in a room with all those animals. All those animals. Pigs, chickens, cows, calves, fish. That's when I made the connection between those animals and the cat curled up on the table in front of me, the dog running after a Frisbee in the yard. I made my decision that day.

I started my research. This, of course, led me to PETA. Which led me to the horrors of the meat industry. I was sick at my stomach, almost in tears from reading stories and watching videos of hideous mistreatment. I was aware that PETA probably spun things to make them look worse. But I couldn't shake off what I had seen. And it was this that led me to the pantry to start pulling out canned beans, corn, chilies, tomatoes, and sauces. Onions, green peppers, and garlic all went into a pot on the stove. Loosely following a recipe out of my new lifeline, Student's Vegetarian Cookbook, I opened cans, measured spices, sautéed, stirred, boiled, simmered, and served the first real meal I'd ever made: vegetarian chili. That was the first vegetarian meal I ever ate, and since then, meat hasn't crossed my lips.

It wasn't easy, of course. Going out to eat was excruciating at first. I would sit, dumfounded and staring at the menu, thinking "what the hell can I possibly eat?" I had to contend with my friends and family waving meat in front of me and saying "C'mon, don't you want a bite?" I quickly learned to not argue when people wanted to get into with me about my choice. It was never worth it. I adjusted, and quickly.

The Internet was a priceless resource. I found websites dedicated entirely to recipes. I found message boards filled with tips on how to survive as a veggie. I found lists of food that were

vegetarian that I never would have guessed I could eat. I found guides to eating at restaurants. I found book recommendations and the small vegetarian section tucked away in a corner of Barnes and Noble. I buried myself in books there for hours while my friends wandered around, wondering where I had disappeared to.

I began to pass out of the phase of newborn veggie. I was confident in my decision. I never argued with people about it, instead making it clear that it wasn't worth my time to talk about it. I began to cook more and more, and I discovered that I not only loved to cook, but that I was good at it. I experimented with recipes I never would have tried before. I experimented with soy protein, tofu, and seitan. I tried veggies I'd never had before, like parsnips, rutabaga, kale, bok choy, and ones I had, like broccoli, cauliflower, celery, carrots, asparagus, tomatoes, corn, and potatoes. I found that the heart of a broccoli stem is not only edible, but delicious, with a slightly sweet, slightly garlic-y flavor. The world of spices was probably the most significant door that was opened to me. Cumin, cinnamon, chili powder, turmeric, thyme, basil, oregano, rosemary, paprika, sage, dill.

I learned to do things like slice gingerroot for Asian dishes. Cut onions with precision before my eyes started to tear. Cut my fingers a fair amount of times before I learned to chop, dice, and slice, properly. Peeled, grated, mashed, boiled, steamed and stir-fried. I learned how to whip up mean gravies and stir-fry sauces, replaced burgers with Boca, and my dad's famous chili with my own famous taco soup. I learned to drain tofu, mash it, mix it with garlic, turmeric, and soy sauce, and broccoli to transform it into an amazing breakfast dish when served with toast. My mother's meatloaf became my veggie loaf (which is way better than it sounds), Thanksgiving turkey became tofurkey (a round loaf made of tofu with stuffing in middle, a special veggie Thanksgiving dish), and my steaks at restaurants became soups and salads.

It wasn't an easy transition, but it was certainly interesting. Dealing with people was awful. But when I was left alone, or supported by my parents, I thoroughly enjoyed scouring the web for new recipes and trying them. I failed nearly as much as I succeeded. That seitan stew I tried to make? It was terrible. It tasted like play-dough. But the Chinese fried rice made with tofu? Delicious. And as a meat eater, that was something I never would have touched. It was funny really, that I found myself eating more as a vegetarian than I did as a meat eater. But it really did make sense. Once my options were cut down, I was forced to expand my horizons. Indian food, Mexican food, Asian food, and even Greek became some of my go-to cuisines. I became irresistibly attracted to cheese, something I'd hated before. And even though I'd read about the horrors of the dairy industry, I decided to take it one step at a time. Veganism would come, maybe one day. For now, I'd stick to

this one thing.

I came to love my new lifestyle. It just worked, fit into my life like just another piece of the puzzle, and I found the phrase that no one could really argue with: it makes me happy. And it did. I felt better in my mind and in my body. My family was supportive, most of my friends were, too, and the ones who weren't learned to shut up. It was what I wanted. And it's still what I want today.



Chris Blanchard, *Abstract*, charcoal

The Blue Wallpaper

Nicole Thomsen

“Cindy, your strokes are too heavy.” I was tired of my mother’s advice on how to paint. I liked my heavy sloppy strokes and I wanted to keep them that way. I was tired of drawing the same people, in the same clothes, in the same lighting, in the same colors. I wanted them how I saw them. I wanted them to be Phaltho blue and Viridian green, I saw them with crimson hair and cadmium eyes. My mother on the other hand refused to imagine, she saw them as how they were and she portrayed them like normal people.

I mixed a dab of Prussian blue in my burnt umber to brighten up the dolls hair; I was enjoying this painting because my mother had yet to notice the colors that weren’t really there. I knew it was only a matter of time before she would find them and then I’d have to start over. Mother was so uptight. If it was brown it must be brown, red must be red. Skirts must go to the ankles, blouses to the wrist and collar to the neck. I thought it was confining, why must I be so grounded? Once I rolled my sleeves back and mother had a fit. I suppose mother never realized the long shirts were restricting. They wouldn’t allow the arm to make a true fluid stroke. Mother never knew, at night, after she had gone to bed for some time, that I would completely undress. I had a hidden canvas; I kept it under my bed. She never suspects me of anything, why should she I never rebel. But here, in my room at night I paint, in the nude. My arms can stretch as far and freely as they like. My mood changes depending on the lighting, depending on the breeze. I can paint all the colors I please, all the colors that are in my head. Mother never knew. She could never tell me to change my strokes to change my colors, she had not a clue. This was my hide out, at night, nude, in my room.

One night I was painting a boy and he was all kinds of greens and blues when I heard the bed in my mother’s room creak. I knew I should have ran to my bed and hid under the blankets, I knew I should have thrown the canvas back into its hiding place but for some reason my hand wouldn’t put down the brush. I knew the creak of the bed had turned to footsteps but I just couldn’t stop. I looked at my hand holding the brush laying there on the canvas and realized that the bristles couldn’t make the stroke I was looking for. I tried again and again but it wasn’t what the painting needed. The footsteps grew louder. I just had to finish I was so close I just needed the right stroke. I looked around the room for something for anything, but it was empty. I looked at the painting and at the brush and at my hand. My hand! My palm was the right width I dipped my hand into the elusive blue and I made one fine fluid movement. The painting was done, but another had begun. I looked at my palm and realized that I was the painting. I don’t know how much of myself I covered with

Prussian blue when I noticed my mother standing in the door way. I suppose I had covered my hands and shoulder, possibly my chest and abdomen. the paint was smooth, my own personal cold crème. I smiled at her, my mother. I was happy for the first time; finally I was the right color the color. My mother was pale very pale and then she suddenly fell to the floor. I stood over her and decided she was the wrong color. I laid my fingers gracefully over the arch of her brows and started on my second canvas. I had to press hard to fill in all her wrinkles. I painted her face blue. Not too much not too little, just the right shade, a soft Pthalo blue.

A Bottle of Wine and a Steak Knife

Victoria Berenda

Sitting on my dorm room floor,
we try to control our laughter.
Molly holds the bottle of Shiraz between her legs,
while I jab a steak knife into the cork.
This isn't the first time this has happened,
and once again,
we swear we will buy a corkscrew in the morning.
She puts her weight on the bottle,
and I twist the knife, which looks like it might snap.
Six minutes of giggling and grunting pass
before I can pour each of us a glass.
"We destroyed the cork," I tell her.
She replies, "Well then,
I guess we have to drink the whole bottle."



Ashley Brinkman, *Pod VIII*, charcoal

Don't be a Statistic: An Essay on the Tyranny of Numbers

Dr. Mark Seely

Two years ago I was diagnosed with cancer. According to medical statistical data, given the particular cell type and the stage of the disease when it was discovered, I have more than a seventy percent chance of still being here three years from now—pretty good odds if I was betting on a hockey game, but they provide little comfort when the wager is pain and death. Indeed, I have a hard time grasping what a seventy percent chance really means in terms of how it is supposed to fit into my actual experience. As a tool to help me understand my situation, “seventy percent” has very little traction; it is just a number. I know that it is better than “fifty percent” and not nearly as good as “ninety percent.” I know that for every one hundred people in my position, thirty are doomed. But I don't know ninety-nine other people in my position, and no matter how hard I try I can't seem to partition hope and dread into the appropriate emotional ratio. Three years from now I won't be seventy percent alive or thirty percent dead.

Part of my trouble absorbing the practical relevance of my seventy percent survival odds is that my evolved mental machinery has a limited capacity for numerical information. Humans are good with countable frequencies because it was useful for our hunter-gatherer ancestors to be able to compare the size of the antelope herd in the valley to the north with the size of the herd in the valley to the south. We are reasonably good with simple fractions because it was important to know how to divide the antelope carcass into equitable portions for distribution—although research suggests that people do not mentally represent a fraction's actual numeric quantity, but instead merely compare the difference between the countable integers in the numerator and the denominator: the numerator is the herd in the valley to the north. . . . We are not so good with irrational numbers or with frequencies in the millions. In fact, our mental machinery is entirely unable to grasp large numbers as anything other than abstraction. Small countable integers such as fifteen have real-world meaning for us. Fifteen million is entirely outside of our first-person experience; it is an abstraction with no possible concrete experiential referent.

Statistical abstractions are likewise not part of our concrete experience. No one has ever seen an average or conversed with a correlation. Percentages and proportions other than those that can be distilled to very simple fractions register only in terms of relative “bigness” or “smallness.” And too often these statistical concepts are applied to events that are themselves abstractions entirely absent of any concrete reality. Consider the following news bite:

There has been a 3.8% increase in private sector growth during the last fiscal cycle.

The private sector is an economic abstraction, and the notion that an economic entity can grow is pure metaphor. A 3.8% increase in the yearly metaphoric growth of an abstraction is a conceptual black hole. A 3.8% increase in the yearly (actual) growth of something entirely concrete, a tree for instance, is quite beyond any kind of experiential grasp. There is nothing in my concrete experience that I could point to that corresponds to a 3.8% increase in the amount of new tree being added this year. I can see the tree is growing. And if I was patient and attentive, I could probably tell the difference between a tree that is experiencing a 3.8% increase in its rate of growth and one that is experiencing a 10% increase if the two trees were growing side by side. But 3.8% of an increase is just a number; and 3.8% of an increase in the growth of an economic abstraction is a mere rhetorical device—when it's not being used as outright propaganda.

I don't mean to deny the usefulness of percentages, averages, and other statistical devices as conceptual tools. However, they are ultimately abstractions that have no corresponding referent in our concrete experience. As conceptual tools they are relevant only within a specific conceptual framework. And further, although their meaning is confined within this framework, too often they are applied in ways that suggest they—along with the framework itself—have real-world potency. It is this latter quality of statistics that I am most concerned with here: the fact that even though they are not properties of the universe itself, they are nonetheless being used as tools to shape our understanding of that universe, framing our experience in ways that can trivialize or completely ignore core features of our humanity in the process.

Lies, damn lies, and statistics

One of the side effects of applying statistical abstractions to concrete real-world circumstances is that it can serve an unrecognized sanitizing function, obscuring the human element and reducing flesh and blood people who experience real pain and suffering to hollow sterilized data points. To see this sterilizing function in operation, consider another popular news-bite statistic: the unemployment rate. A higher rate of unemployment is bad and a lower rate is good; a rate of 7.4% is better than a rate of 9.6%, for example. The numbers themselves, however, don't carry any meaningful human content. To have even a remote inkling of what the difference between 7.4% and

9.6% means in real human terms, I need at the very least to know how many humans we're talking about. But even when population frequencies are used to amplify the emotional impact of the percentages, I am left no closer to meaningful comprehension. The frequencies are typically in the millions—values that ultimately have no more concrete reality for me than a percentage.

I have no doubt that the unemployment rate is related in some way to actual concrete circumstances of real human beings. But it is impossible to start with the numbers and navigate my way out to some grasp of authentic human reality. Economies don't have jobs. States, cities, and "demographic sectors" don't have jobs. Individual people—breathing eating dreaming human persons—have jobs. In consumer society, a person's employment status has a direct impact on his or her ability to participate. Additionally, because healthcare is also treated as a consumable commodity, a job can be quite literally a matter of life and death: a five year cancer survival rate of seventy percent is irrelevant if you can't afford the cost of treatment. But the life (or death) experiences of actual people who are unemployed, or marginally employed, or underemployed, or employed full-time in a soul-draining job are entirely absent: trivial details obscured beneath the numbers, intimate and unpleasant personal details that don't have any place in lofty abstract ideology-driven economic policy decisions. Although specific suffering individuals are sometimes put on display to give the issue a human face (literally, and simply an embellishment for emotional emphasis), for the bureaucrats in charge of policy decisions the only relevant consideration is the number, the rate itself and its relation to previous rates, or rates in other states, cities, or demographic categories, a number entirely devoid of personal relevance for anyone.

Even empty numbers can be impressive. They can add weight to an otherwise weak argument and provide an air of authority to statements of fact. This can be especially true when it's not clear what the numbers actually mean. Statistical data, for example, are used to bolster political agendas; statistical abstractions are a go-to tool politicians can use both to inflate the positive and to obscure the negative—or vice versa. This is only possible because the numbers themselves, outside of their rhetorical function, are personally meaningless. And so combat fatalities—actual people with actual names who are killed as a result of military violence to promote the goals of some political, religious, or economic abstraction—are reduced to data points in a running body count or aggregated into the innocuous sounding, collateral damage.

It is important to note that this sanitizing function is a natural and unavoidable feature of a conceptual frame organized around numerical abstractions and not (necessarily) the result of an

intentional conspiracy to hide the ugly and brutal realities of our consumer industrial system. In fact, numerical abstractions are sometimes used to highlight specific forms of social ugliness, when, for example, a public service announcement informs us that one in five children in the US are suffering from chronic hunger, or a mayor makes a pitch for more cops on the street by citing the recent increase in the rate of violent crime. But even here, the hunger seems less painful when it is removed from the empty plates of specific children and served up as a simple ratio, and the violence seems less bloody when it is translated into a decimal fraction.

The need to reduce the knotty and multifarious details of concrete human experience to numeric abstractions derives from two major characteristics of consumer society. First, it emerges directly from the mismatch between modern society's massive size and complexity and our evolution-derived cognitive limitations. Our cognitive systems evolved to accommodate a social environment populated by at most a few dozen people, none of whom were strangers. A typical day for modern city-dwellers is populated by hundreds and perhaps thousands of people, the majority of whom they have never seen before and will never see again. Research suggests that there is an upper limit to how many people we can fit into our social experience in a personally meaningful way, a number somewhere around 150. Thus, organizing our social experience in modern civilization requires considerable abstraction: people as members of categories rather than as unique individuals. Second, numerical abstraction is an essential feature of the mass production process and its obsession with efficiency. Statistics are essential tools of industry. The details of any individual mass-produced widget are irrelevant because they are almost exactly like the details of every other widget in its production batch. However, even in a tightly controlled production process there will be slight variations. Quality control requires the ability to evaluate these variations in terms of their collective magnitude. The idiosyncrasies of any individual widget are absorbed as part of a numeric indicator of variability. In industry, the important consideration is not the specific details of individual units, but the larger indicators of process efficiency: widgets produced per unit of time, cost of production, batch variability, etc. But in consumer society, consumption is itself a mass-produced product. Individual people become consumer units to be categorized according to their market potential and preferences, and their consumption efficiency is evaluated in aggregate form (i.e., "metadata") with the aid of a variety of numeric indicators. The singular, unique, individual person is not an important consideration. The aggregate is all that matters.

But humans are not economic units any more than they are statistical abstractions.

Irreducibly unique

As members of the same species (itself a statistically-supported categorical abstraction), we share a lot of superficial characteristics in common with one another. But, to borrow the jargon of statistics, the within-group variability is enormous. Each and every human person is a once-in-the-life-of-the-universe occurrence. Each and every experienced event, regardless of how mundane or prosaic, inherits an impossible level of uniqueness as a function of its being experienced from a unique perspective by an impossibly unique individual human being.

The history of civilization is the history of the subjugation of human uniqueness. Civilization involves the artificial structuring of human relationships and the distortion and redirection of natural, idiosyncratic human behavior toward unnatural, standardized ends. Early civilizations accomplished this largely by direct force and the promulgation of religious and quasi-religious world views that legitimized a hierarchical apportioning of power. Once artificial stratification is imposed on the social world, the irreducible uniqueness of individual human beings starts to fade from the public arena: people treat one another—and eventually themselves—in terms of the roles they play in the civilized order.

Both religion and direct force are still very much operative in modern Western civilization. But modern global empire no longer requires any justification. Economic coercion and mandatory consumption have largely supplanted the need for chain and whip. And because of the size and complexity of modern civilization, the individual's only means of making conceptual contact with the larger social system is through his or her category affiliations. The larger social world has no choice but to become a world of categorical abstractions; there is simply no other way of thinking about it. Within this world of abstractions, the irreducible uniqueness of individual human beings becomes little more than background noise to be dampened in the name of efficiency. Statistical concepts are just one tool of many for sanding down the rough edges of individuality so that the mass consumption machine can run smoothly.

I am convinced that if every one of us had no choice but to treat each other as authentic human beings, as irreducibly unique individuals, global mass society would immediately pop into nonexistence in a cloud of fairy dust. There is simply no way to justify sending irreducibly unique one-of-a-kind authentic humans to work in mines or fields or factories. It would be inconceivable to schedule a drone strike to vaporize a never-again-to-exist being in the name of a geopolitical abstraction such as “terrorism”—and it would be unthinkable to call the first-ever-in-the-

universe young child sleeping in the room next to the suspected terrorist drone target, dreaming his last never-before-and-never-again dreamed dream, “collateral damage.”

But such a world is a pipe dream relegated to members of the category, idealist. I’ve been told that because civilization is here it can’t be undone. You can’t put the toothpaste back in the tube. We need civilization, after all. We need civilization in order to give our lives collective meaning and purpose because meaning and purpose have been so effectively leached from our actual experience. And we need civilization to give us hope when we develop cancer from being exposed to its toxic dreck—or at least to let us know whether the odds are in our favor. Seventy percent. Seventy out of a hundred. Seven-tenths.

My doctor is optimistic. He tells me that people in far worse shape and with far worse statistical prospects have managed to beat this disease. But those aren’t the folks I wonder about most. The survivors were the ones who made it to the numerator, part of that rarified herd in the valley to the north. I can’t stop thinking about the rest of the folks who were right there alongside them in the denominator. Each one of them stood where I am now, staring up at the topography of an unfamiliar cliff face, and wondering if they would live to see the top side of the fraction bar.

Moth Harvest: Writer

Dr. Rochelle Robertson

It is the monarch which holds the record
for flying those thousand miles
year after year
since time
to survive.

The monarch,
in multicolored magnificence,
in community,
life spent with others of its kind,
is beautiful;
is infamous.

It has company to keep it warm.
It brightens a dreary early autumn landscape.
It braves daunting journey at turn of seasons;
smartly finds a temperate vacation spot,
knows how to enjoy its window of life
in fluttery merriment and communion.

The house moth holds a lesser sway.
She, always finding the dark, dusty places:
behind the shutters,
in cracked window corner,
or musty coat closet,
year after year
since time
to survive.

The house moth,
relatively small,
an insignificant brown-ish for blend,
is alone
flitting away from blazing sun;

is one,
sweeping across the cold cover of night.
Where is the crowd
to warn her against spider's web,
or blow the whistle
on that myth about reaching the moon?
No insect "cover-girl,"
this ordinary one.
She, immobilized in encyclopedia,
under letter "H" or "M" or "types of" ...
Unnoticed against barks of trees,
unnamed except by insect savant,
and child closest to the earth;
stereotyped for gnawing into
and through
and out of
and back into
trouble;
so rarely caught in the act;
not even worth capture.
She hangs too close to winter things,
unwilling to challenge
God's purpose and design:
Quivering from cold?
Fear?
Excitement?
In preparation to fly
again?

Another harvest.
Women looping Christmas blankets
in butterfly patterns,

at a local coffee shop
will reap the monarchs
they've sewn.

Dust rises in dense clouds
over a field of dried corn stalks;
the gathering
and then the dust
sown to dust...
Powder off a house moth's wings.

Writers with words
planting:
colorful and plain,
significant and irrelevant,
noteworthy and inane,
since time
to survive.

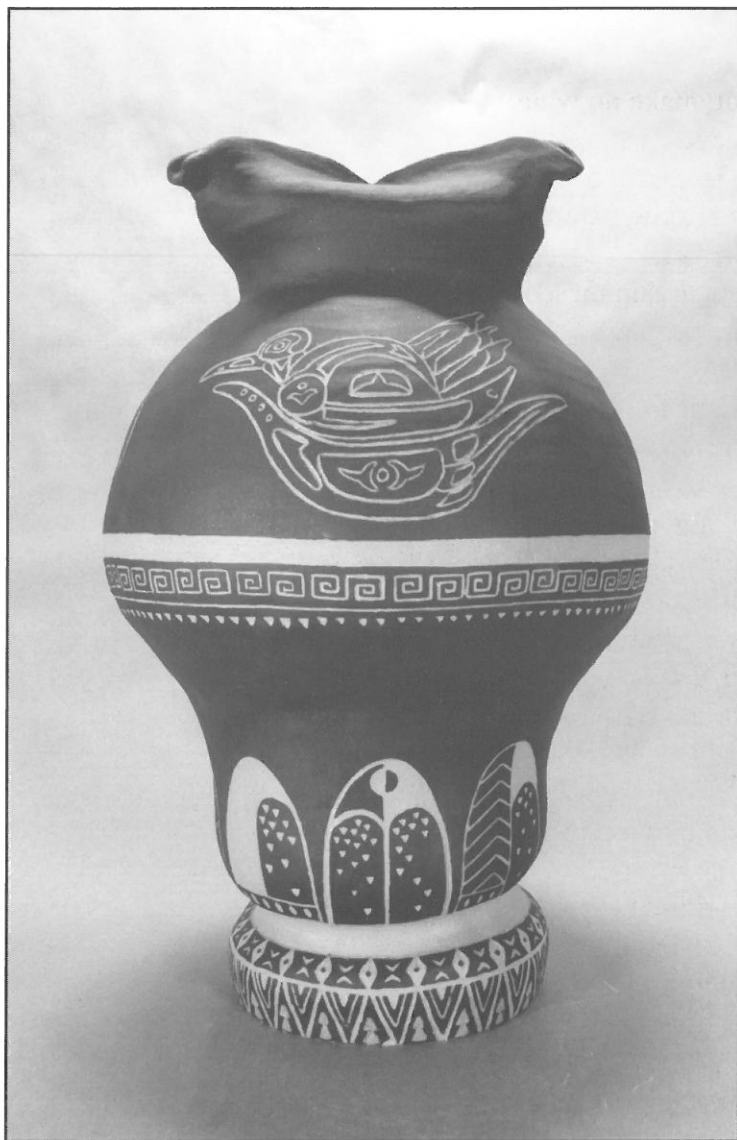
A Workman's Thoughts

John Groppe

I raised him as my son.
I know not whence he came,
but I loved him, taught him,
and raised him as my son.
He has large hands, like mine,
and will labor all day
shaping wood or stone—stone
being more plentiful in Galilee.
Like any lad, he thinks work play,
play at being man,
a shaper of things, a maker.
He got his dreams, his visions
from his mother, she being closer
to the temple families
and to the deepest memories
by which we know who we are
and why we are here.
I cut and join and build,
but she—she knows why men like me
do what we do year after year.
She seems to know the future,
not next year or the year next
but sometime well beyond
this house I am making,
a time beyond wars and death.
Nor did I know she knew
when I asked her into my house.
I thought the house well made
with stout walls and a tight roof,
better fit for a family than most.
She thought it larger, like a dwelling

for a rabbi or priest—
even a king, though a king of old
when our people give up our tents
and ceased roaming with our flocks
and our leaders lived like us in the village.
It is a simple three room house
with a place for our work beast,
an open courtyard for cooking,
and she was pleased.
So here we raised our only son—
I teaching him the heft of things
and she the gift he bore.
Too old a man to see the outcome
of my labor—soon I will die
and leave a young widow
who is like one of the Anawim—
those acquainted with the cries
of widows, orphans, and prisoners—
but also like one of the farseers
who tell of things almost beyond our ken,
and also our son—a solid workman
who astounds the rabbis
for the way he talks to folks—
the fishermen, tavern keepers,
vineyard owners and their grape pickers,
even a prostitute and money lenders—
and tells them simple stories
of banquets and harvests
the like of which he has never known.
The people seemed changed by his stories,
and that angers the law scholars.

I grow no wheat, make no wine,
just stout walls and tight roofs—
things that last—yes, for a while only.
Still I feel proud of this safe dwelling
for my wife and son—
he who lives less within these walls
and more for the people,
even those he angers,
and she who seems to go back
to the beginnings and dwells more in our lore
than in these walls,
dwells in some larger future
as if these stones and roofs
hold something vaster
yet all within this small space.
I bake no bread, grown no figs make no wine
only stout walls and tight roofs—
things to last.
But what lasts.
Still we rejoice within our walls
and I feel proud,
but she seems, without saying,
to go back to the beginning,
to dwell more in our lore
than in these walls
and even more in some larger future
as if these stones and lintels
will be transformed what a simple workman can say.



Anastasia March. *Greek Amphora*, black slip on stoneware

Ian

Alberto Anguiano, Steven Quella, Mike Lipton



One of my favorite memories of Ian was when we dressed up as “Super Troopers” for Halloween last year along with the other roommates, Tyler and Steve. We did trick or treat for the hungry with those costumes on and seriously had a blast. That night we would chase people in those outfits and “cuff” them. We made everyone who saw us running across the IM field laugh.

Ian was the life of the party anywhere we went. He always reminded us that soccer was not the most important thing when we would be upset about a game. He knew exactly how to put a smile on our faces. He was one of my best friends that will forever be a part of my life.

—Alberto Anguiano ‘14

My favorite memory of Ian is before almost every game. We would joke around by throwing and kicking the ball back and forth when I got done with my warm-up. Then he would ask if I wanted to switch positions, goalkeeper and midfielder, after he made some “sick” save.

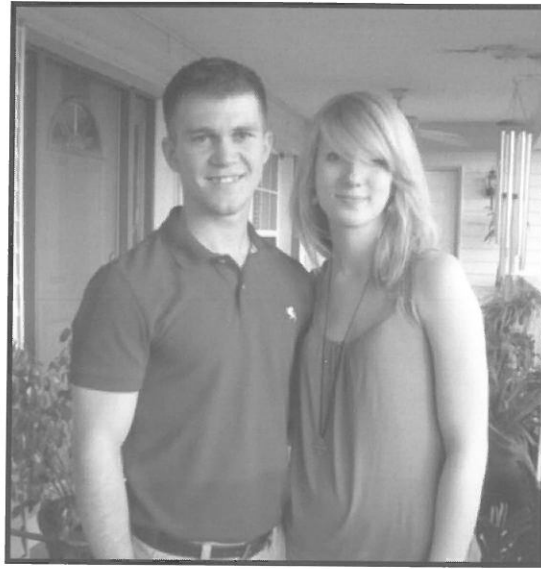
He was the only person I had a pregame handshake with. It was only a double fist bump and him saying sarcastically “don’t fuck up,” but it took the pressure off and helped me stay relaxed on the field.

—Steven Quella ‘14

Ian was a great friend, person, teammate, and brother to many of us. He will be deeply missed. He was one of the bravest and strongest people I’ve ever met. He had a call that was bigger than any of us on the soccer team, and we all knew that. He was going to fight for our country. We will always remember Ian as part of our family!

—Mike Lipton ‘13





Ian Jennie Weer

Ian Nelson Connelly was someone that cannot be summed up in a few words.

He owned many titles. Brother, son, friend, co-worker, boyfriend and best friend.

On January 26, 2013, I met Ian on a Kairos retreat for Saint Joseph's College. On January 26, 2014, Ian died, exactly one year after I met him.

For spring break the semester I met him, he went home to Florida, but we kept in contact through texts and many phone calls that my sister would tease me about. He asked me where my favorite restaurant was, and 6AM that Thursday morning, he asked if I would go on a date with him when he got back on Saturday.

This was a big deal for me, not only because it was my first date with Ian, but also because it was my first date ever. I was nervous and excited, and when I told my mom, the first question she asked was about his last name. "Oh, an Irish," she sighed.

On Saturday, March 16, we went to Panera, after going to see the movie *The Call* (which I only wanted to see because it was produced by the WWE). He put down his spoon and said,

"So... do you want to make this official?"

I smiled and nodded, and that was that.

Just like Ian, our relationship couldn't be summed up in a few words. We brought our

problems to each other, spent all our free time together, and whenever I was alone, people always asked, "Where's your other half?" In the summer, Ian lived on campus and would frequently pick me up where I worked at a factory about an hour north from Saint Joe's. He'd bring me sunflowers, and some food, and we'd spend the evening together before he'd go back to work and school.

He was my comfort, my best friend, my Florida sunshine.

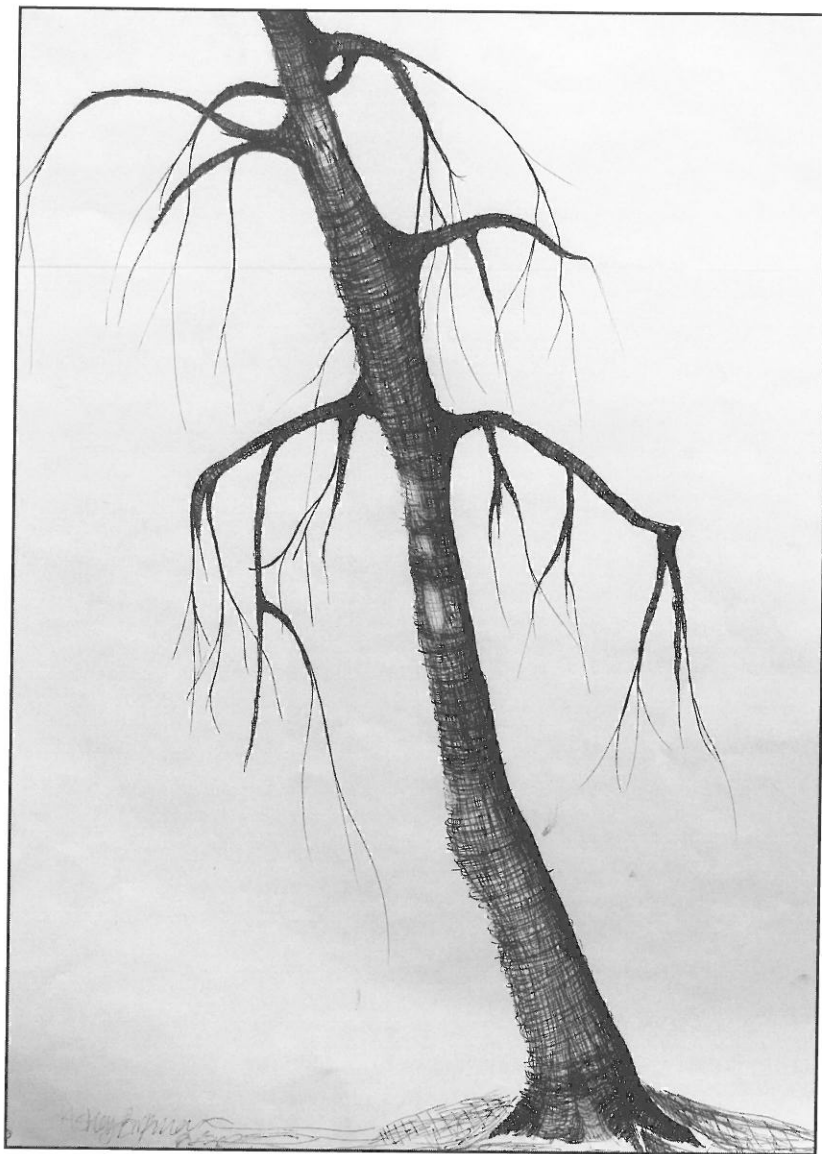
He was the kindest person to my family, and he fit right into all the goofiness. The first time he met my sister Chloe, she gave him a hug. He became close friends with my brothers, and made all my sisters laugh. He always volunteered to drive my family places or run errands for my parents – as long as I was in the passenger seat, that is.

The day before his birthday, Ian gave me a late six-month anniversary present: a ring with two hearts. He gave it to me as a promise to be the best person he could be for me, and that he would always be there for me. Like all relationships, we had our ups and downs. There were great days and there were terrible days. But at the end of the day, we worked everything out, and I could never imagine being without him. We really were the best we could be for each other.

I am now forced to live in a world without him. I miss Ian every day. Anytime I walk alone, anytime I check my phone, when I go to work, church, or classes. I miss him coming up to "get more food" in the cafeteria, when really we just talked as much as we could.

So I'd like to say thank you to Ian for the best year of my life, for being my best friend, and boyfriend. I'm confident I'll never meet anyone like you, which is why I'll hang on to the good times. I'll hang on to the endless nights of fun and the times we'd watch *Bob's Burgers* and Vines and laugh 'till we cried. I'll have our dates, our camping nights, and all the moments you'd shout my name from across the IM field.

I love you, and I miss you every day.



Ashley Brinkman, *Tree Study*, pen and ink



2013 ~ 2014